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Shah gives 'winning formula' to K'taka BJP

BJP is aiming to sweep all LS seats along with ally JD(S)

MYSURU, 11 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah has given state leaders a "winning formula" to ensure that the party's alliance with the JD(S) wins all 28 seats in the Lok Sabha polls, by converting Prime Minister Narendra Modi's popularity into votes, Karnataka BJP unit President BY Vijayendra said on Sunday.

Speaking to reporters after Shah's meetings with state BJP core committee members and leaders of the party's Mysuru cluster here, he said no discussion on candidate selection had taken place today, and that the seat-sharing terms with JD(S) will be decided by the leadership of both parties at "Delhi level." The party's Mysuru cluster consists of Mysuru, Mandya, Hassan and Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha segments. "Amit Shah's Mysuru visit was successful... He said that in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls the situation is favourable for the NDA to win all 28 seats in Karnataka. He gave suggestions regarding our plan of action in converting Narendra Modi's popularity into votes, and said efforts should be made to increase votes by 10 per cent in every booth," Vijayendra said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah being felicitated during the Suttur Jathra Mahothsava, in Mysuru on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Speaking to reporters here after the meeting, he said all the leaders who attended today's meetings are confident that if Shah's plan of action is implemented effectively at booth level, the BJP and JD(S) can win all the Lok Sabha seats in the state.

"We too have assured him (Shah) that we will work together unitedly as per his guidance," he said, adding that the senior party leader's visit has instilled enthusiasm among party workers and leaders. In the 2019 polls, the BJP had won 26 of the total 28 Lok Sabha seats from Karnataka, including that of Sumalatha Ambareesh, an independent supported by the party from Mandya. The Congress and the JD(S) had secured just one seat each.

JD(S), which is now in alliance with BJP, had then contested the Lok Sabha polls together with the Congress. Responding to a question on seat sharing between BJP and JD(S), Vijayendra said, "It will be discussed by state leaders of the party and leadership of both parties at Delhi level. No discussions have happened today about it.

—PTI

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Eye on polls, PM launches ₹7,500K cr MP projects

Women will get ₹1.5K per month for nutritious food

JHABUA, 11 FEB

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday visited Jhabua in Madhya Pradesh and inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of Rs 7,550 crore development projects for the state.He also disbursed monthly installments to nearly two lakh women beneficiaries under the 'Aahar Anudan Yojana' of the state.

Under the scheme, Rs 1,500 per month are provided for nutritious food to women from especially the backward tribes.Modi also distributed 1.75 lakh 'adhikar abhilekh' (record of land rights) under the SVAMITVA scheme, which will provide documentary evidence to people for the right to their land.He also laid the foundation stone of the Tantya Mama Bhil University which will cater to the youth from tribal-dominated districts of the state.To be developed at a cost of Rs 170 crore, the university will provide world-class infrastructure for holistic development of students.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed during the 'Janjatiya Sammelan' in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Modi on Sunday said he is confident the BJP will cross the 370 seats-mark in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, and even the opposition leaders in Parliament are saying the ruling coalition will get more than 400 seats.

Addressing a public meeting of tribal community members in Madhya Pradesh's Jhabua district, Modi ((donning a tribal waistcoat)) said the Congress was anti-tribal and thought of villages, farmers and the poor only during elections. He also said he had got overwhelming love from the people as he visited temples associated with Lord Ram in the south of the country.

- Aware of their imminent defeat, Congress and its allies are resorting to last-ditch tactics, Modi said, adding that "loot and divide is the motto of Congress

Aware of their imminent defeat, Congress and its allies are resorting to last-ditch tactics, Modi said, adding that "loot and divide is the motto of Congress. Congress and other opposition leaders abuse him because he is working for the betterment of tribals and the poor, Modi said.

But the people know the truth about the Congress and will never let it succeed in its motives, the PM said.

—PTI

Assam okays bill to ban 'magical healing'

GUWAHATI, 11 FEB

Assam government gave its nod to a bill to prohibit and eliminate practices of "magical healing" in the name of treatment, proposing strong punitive action against the "healers". The decision was taken at a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday. Sharing the decisions taken at the meeting on X, Sarma said the cabinet also selected 10 cities/towns for a dedicated sustainable development programme and proposed to bring in reforms in the state municipal cadres.

—PTI

25 more arrested in connection with Haldwani violence

HALDWANI, 11 FEB

Twenty-five more people have been arrested in connection with the Haldwani violence over the past 24 hours, Nainital SSP Prahlad Meena said. Most of these arrests have been made from within the limits of the Nainital district.

Ammunition they had allegedly looted from the Banbhoolpura police station have also been recovered from them, the SSP said.

Asked whether the arrests included that of the key accused in the case Abdul Malik, the SSP said he will also be arrested soon. *—PTI*

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Pak parties try their best to form coalition govt

ISLAMABAD/LAHORE, 11 FEB

The three main political parties in Pakistan on Sunday intensified their efforts for the formation of a coalition government after it became clear that the coup-prone country faced a hung Parliament after general elections marred by allegations of rigging.

The general elections were held on Thursday, but the unusual delay in the announcement of results vitiated the atmosphere as several parties cried foul and some resorted to protests.

Former prime minister and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supremo Nawaz Sharif received the backing of the powerful Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir on Saturday for his call for a unity government to pull Pakistan out of its current difficulties.

- Former prime minister and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz supremo Nawaz Sharif received the backing of the powerful Pakistan Army chief General Asim Munir

Amidst allegations of vote rigging and inordinate delay in announcing the results, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on Sunday published the results of 264 out of 265 contested seats in the 266-member National Assembly. The result of one constituency was withheld by the ECP due to complaints of fraud. Election to one seat was postponed after the death of a candidate.

Independent candidates, a vast majority of them backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), won 101 seats in the National Assembly. They were followed by three-time former Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with 75 seats, which technically is the single largest party in Parliament.

The Pakistan Peoples Party of Bilawal Zardari Bhutto got 54 seats, and the Karachi-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement Pakistan of Urdu-speaking people who migrated from India during the Partition, got 17 seats. *—PTI*

Borders of Delhi, Haryana fortified

NEW DELHI/ CHANDIGARH, 11 FEB

Ahead of a proposed 'Delhi Chalo' march by farmer unions on Tuesday, authorities in Haryana and Delhi fortified borders with neighbouring states at many places by putting up concrete blocks, road spike barriers and barbed wires and deploying thousands of police personnel, besides imposing prohibitory orders.

While the Centre has invited farmer unions for another meeting to discuss their demands today the move to block borders to prevent the protesters from entering the national capital drew flak from Opposition parties and farmer groups on Sunday.

Authorities, however, defended the restrictions, citing the 2020 agitation against the now-repealed three farm laws that had stretched to over a year.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and several farmer associations, mostly from UP, Haryana and Punjab, have called the protest to press the Centre to accept their demands, including the enactment of a law to guarantee a minimum support price for crops. Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra shared a video of road spike barriers being placed on state borders and said, "Is laying nails-thorns in the path of farmers 'amritkaal' or 'anyaykaal'?" *—PTI*

A BULLDOZER WELCOME

People climb on bulldozers to shower petals on MLAs visiting Ram Janmabhoomi temple on Sunday near the border of Barabanki and Ayodhya. Bulldozers are used by BJP governments to carry out demolitions **PHOTO: ANI**

Aus lift fourth U-19 World Cup title

BENONI, 11 FEB

Australia replicated another World Cup final heartbreak for defending champions India following their 79-run victory to lift their fourth Under-19 World Cup title at Willowmoore Park on Sunday. In a span of three months, India twice went unbeaten to the final of the World Cup, to face Australia in the final and on both occasions, they ended up on the losing side.

When the fate of the game was decided, the jubilant Australian players stormed onto the field, with skipper Hugh Weibgen making an impression of Michael Vaughan in 2005 after winning the Ashes. While chasing a target of 254, two maiden overs from Australia foreshadowed the chain of events that were about to unfold in the next 43.5 overs. Arshin Kulkarni and Musheer Khan were the two casualties in the first powerplay, which handed Australia early control in the final. Callum Vidler was sensational in his spell, while Mahli Beardman soared high with his pace. Beardman dismissed India's skipper Uday Saharan in single digits for the first time in the tournament, which indicated that the chase wasn't going to be a walk in the park for the Indian team. *—ANI*

PHOTO: X/ICC

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UPI SERVICES TO ROLL OUT IN SL, MAURITIUS

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

India's Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services will be rolled out in Sri Lanka and Mauritius at a virtual ceremony on Monday that will be witnessed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the top leadership of the two island nations

Developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), UPI is an instant real-time payment system to facilitate inter-bank transactions through mobile phones. RuPay is a global card payment network from India, with wide acceptance at shops, ATMs, and online. The launch of the Indian services in Sri Lanka and Mauritius is taking place amid New Delhi's increasing bilateral economic ties with the two countries "India has emerged as a leader in Fintech innovation and Digital Public Infrastructure. The prime minister has placed a strong emphasis on sharing our development experiences and innovation with partner countries," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a statement.

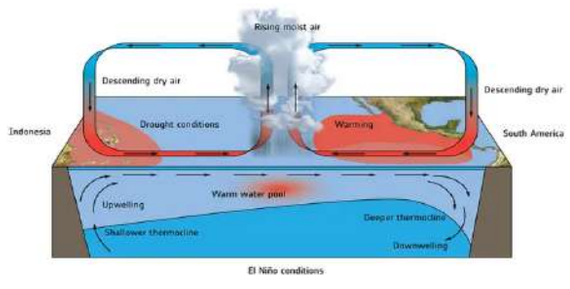
It said given India's robust cultural and people-to-people linkages with Sri Lanka and Mauritius, the launch will benefit a wide cross-section of people through a faster and seamless digital transaction experience and enhance digital connectivity between the countries. *—PTI*

EL NINO WEAKENING

India can expect a 'bountiful monsoon'

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

After delivering a warm 2023, El Nino conditions are set to dissipate by June this year raising hopes of "bountiful monsoon" rains this season, meteorologists have predicted. At least two global climate agencies announced last week that El Nino, the warming of the equatorial Pacific Ocean that impacts weather across the world, has started to weaken and there is a probability of La Nina conditions setting in by August. Weather scientists in India, tracking the developments closely, have said that La Nina conditions setting in by June-August could mean monsoon rains would be better this year than the last year. they also struck a word of caution citing the 'spring predictability barrier', considered a forecasting headache as weather models have a harder time making accurate forecasts.



The southwest monsoon delivers about 70 per cent of India'sannual rainfall **PHOTO: EARTH HOW**

The southwest monsoon delivers about 70 per cent of India's annual rainfall, critical for the agriculture sector that accounts for about 14 per cent of the GDP and employs more than half of its 1.4 billion population.

United States' National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said last week that there is a 79 per cent chance that El Nino will transition to ENSO-neutral by April-June and a 55 per cent chance of La Nina developing in June-August. European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service confirmed that El Nino has started weakening. "Some models indicate La Nina, while some predict ENSO-neutral conditions. However, all models suggest an end to El Nino," D Sivananda Pai, a scientist at the India Meteoro logical Department, said. *—PTI*

Govt, Oppn likely to lock horns over K'taka budget

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

The Karnataka legislature's Budget Session, which will begin on Monday, is expected to be fraught, with the Centre's alleged discrimination against the State and the accusations of corruption and poor governance faced by the Siddaramaiah-led government likely to take centre-stage.

The Congress government is expected to showcase its agenda ahead of the Lok Sabha polls later this year through the Governor's address and presentation of the State Budget, while the opposition BJP and JD(S), which are set to fight the polls jointly, look to show the government in poor light by highlighting the allegations against the administration.

A worker cleans up Assembly hall of Vidhana Soudha on eve of legislature session, in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

The 10-day session, which will commence with Governor Thawaarchand Gehlot's address to the joint session of both houses of the state legislature, will see Chief Minister Siddaramaiah presenting his record 15th Budget on 16 February.

The session, which will conclude on 23 February, is also expected to be stormy as the united opposition of the BJP and JD(S) are likely to corner the government on a host of issues, which the ruling Congress has vowed to strongly counter.

Karnataka State Contractors' Association President D Kempanna's recent allegation that the former BJP administration's practice of taking 40 per cent 'commission' on government contracts continues even under the Congress dispensation because of corrupt officials, is likely to give ammunition for the opposition to attack the government. *—PTI*

20-year-old woman dies in accident in City

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

A 20-year-old woman died after being hit by a canter vehicle on Sunday. The victim, Sudha died on the spot when the canter truck collided with a KSRTC bus.Sudha and her mother were travelling on a two-wheeler when they were caught between the collisions. Sudha's mother succumbed to the injuries and is currently undergoing treatment. The passengers on the bus were unharmed. Both the KSRTC bus driver and the canter driver, Sharief, are are being treated at Silicon City Hospital. In another incident,at around 3.30 am a lorry carrying sesame overturned on Nice Road near Bengaluru, on the Electronic City-Hosur road. The truck driver sustained minor injuries in the accident. *—Salar News*

1 held for offensive remarks against Minister

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Vidhana Soudha police arrested a man for his alleged derogatory remarks against Minister Transport Minister Ramalinga Reddy during Chief Minister's Janaspandana programme on Thursday. Police arrested Munegowda,50, a resident of Doddaballapura, who during the event shouted slogans against Reddy while Chief Minister Siddaramaiah was addressing people's issues. He is also accused of obstructing government officials from performing their duties during the event.During the interrogation, Munegowda confessed to his actions, stating that he lost his temper and spoke disrespectfully about the Minister acknowledging it as a mistake. He was later remanded to judicial custody. *—Salar News*

St. Joseph's launches NEERATHON'24

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

The Wildlife Awareness and Conservation Club of St. Joseph's University launched NEERATHON'24, a marathon dedicated to water conservation on Sunday. NEERATHON'24 transcends individual participation in the 2km, 5km, or Para run (1.5km) for specially-abled people, urging individuals to be a part of a movement to combat water scarcity. Around, 2.2 billion people lack safe drinking water, highlighting the crisis's human cost. It aims to raise awareness about unsustainable water management, pollution, and biodiversity loss linked to water scarcity. Freshwater ecosystems, vital for countless species, suffer due to excessive extraction and habitat destruction.The marathon is a stride towards a sustainable future. Every step taken, every drop saved, contributes to a better tomorrow. The event invites individuals to run for a cause and save the water that is necessary to survive.*—Salar News*

Education fair by US Consulate to be held across State

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Students interested in studying at American universities can participate in the free higher education fair series held by the US Department of Commerce, US Commercial Service in India, and US Consulate General Chennai from 12 February to 20 February. The fair is being held at JW Marriott Hotel, VittalMallya Road, between 4pm and 7pm.18 Universities including Arizona State University, University of San Diego, University of Utah, Bryant University, University of Texas, and University of Arkansas will be a part of the fair. The fair is open to students interested in doctoral or masters programmes in United States. The fairs will also be held in Manipal, Mangaluru, Kochi and Coimbatore. *—Salar News*

CM challenges Shah to hold public debate on guarantees

CM called out BJP for promising to implement schemes in BJP ruled states

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Asserting that he could prove that the State's treasury is not empty because of the guarantee schemes, Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday challenged Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who is in the State, to participate in a public debate with him.

Shah arrived in Mysuru this morning and visited Chamundeshwari temple in the Chamundi hills and attended a fair before participating in meetings with State BJP leaders to discuss preparations for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

Countering Shah's alleged claims that State government's treasury is empty because of the guarantee schemes, Siddaramaiah said, "If this is Shah's firm opinion, he should participate in a public debate with me. I can prove that our treasury is not empty because of the guarantee schemes, and instead, there is an unfair distribution of taxes from the Centre to the state. This is also a challenge to Amit Shah."

Accusing BJP leaders of trying to "destabilise" the guarantee schemes of his government, the Chief Minister questioned if they harboured hatred for the people of Karnataka and claimed that those opposing them will not get the blessings of Goddess Chamundeshwari and will not have the mercy of Lord Ram.

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

"If there are any objections to the guarantee schemes, BJP leaders should clearly state their opposition immediately, and announce that all guarantee schemes will be discontinued in the states governed by BJP. Why are BJP leaders trying to destabilise guarantee schemes in Karnataka? Do they harbor hatred for the people of Karnataka," Siddaramaiah asked.

The Chief Minister also accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "stealing" the State's guarantee schemes, including the word 'guarantee' and "advertising" it under the same name, despite allegedly opposing them.

In a statement released by his office, he called out the hypocrisy of BJP leaders opposing guarantee schemes in Karnataka on one hand, and promising to implement similar ones in states they govern on the other. "This shows the anti-poor stance and intellectual bankruptcy of that party (BJP)," he said.

Claiming that the BJP leaders' real opposition is not the guarantee schemes, but the beneficiaries of these schemes - the poor - Siddaramaiah alleged that there is a history of BJP and the SanghParivar opposing programmes intended for the needy.

"Even when the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi called for 'GaribiHatao' (Eradicate Poverty), the same RSS-BJP opposed it," he said.

To buttress his claims, Siddaramaiah alleged that the Central government, which had refused to provide rice for the state's 'Anna Bhagya' scheme (an additional 5 kg free rice for every member of BPL household), is now selling the same under the brand 'Bharat'.

He also claimed that during his first term as chief minister, the BJP leaders had shown their "intolerance and jealousy" towards welfare programmes introduced for the poor. *—PTI*

PHOTO: SALAR

Shah offers prayers to Goddess Chamundeshwari in Mysuru

MYSURU, 11 FEB

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday visited Chamundi Hills here and offered prayers to Goddess Chamundeshwari, presiding deity of Mysuru.Union Minister Pralhad Joshi, Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra among those who accompanied him.Shah offered prayers to Lord Ganesh ahead of worshipping Chamundeshwari, who is also regarded as "NaadaDevate" (state deity), in the presence of priests chanting Sanskrit hymns, official sources said.He took a 'pradakshina' (circumambulating in a clockwise direction) of the shrine, after offering prayers.Elaborate security arrangements were made around the temple and the route leading to it from the city, for Shah's visit.The over 1,000 years old temple was a small shrine initially later becoming a major place of worship, officials said.It assumed significance after the Mysuru Maharajas, the Wodeyars, came to power in 1399 AD, who were great devotees of Chamundeswari, who became their home deity they said. *—PTI*

'TABLIGHI BADE IJTEMA'

Tension brews in Bagalkot over Ijtema event

BAGALKOT, 11 FEB

A wave of tension grips across Bagalkot as preparations for the "Tablighi Bade Ijtema" programme, organised by the Muslim community in Sector No 112 of Navanagar, deepen.

Scheduled for 14 to 15 February, this religious event draws masses of Muslims, alongside clerics from various states, to participate in spiritual activities.

The pro-Hindu organisations strongly opposed it and labelled it as communal and potentially incendiary. Hindu JagranVedike activists took to the streets of Bagalkot in a massive protest, demanding the withdrawal of permission granted for the event.

The protest, marked by slogans denouncing Congress, commenced from the AmbaBhavani temple in Killa Oni, traversing through prominent landmarks such as MG Road and Vallabhbhai Circle. Despite appeals from pro-Hindu groups to the Bagalkot Town Development Authority to revoke the event's permission, the organisational efforts continue undeterred.

In response to queries regarding the escalating tensions, Bagalkot MLA and Chairman of Bagalkote Town Development Authority, HY Meti, refrained from commenting, stating, "They are conducting their religious program, and I will not intervene." *— Salar News*

Not an aspirant for Mandya LS seat: Nikhil

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Nikhil Kumaraswamy **PHOTO: PTI**

Janata Dal (S) Youth President Nikhil Kumaraswamy dismissed the rumours regarding his candidature from Mandya for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking to the media on Sunday, he said, "I will not take a U-turn regarding my decision. I have announced that I am not contesting and I will not. In 2019, I contested from there and lost." Nikhil said that the JDS workers of Mandya are pressuring him to participate in the election activities. "The leaders and workers are forcing me to be a part of the election. Hence, I am working there to strengthen the BJP-JDS alliance and work towards making Narendra Modi the Prime Minister again," said Nikhil.

Nikhil said that his focus will be on all the 28 constituencies of the State and to strengthen the alliance. Regarding the ticket sharing between the two parties, Nikhil said, "BJP and our leaders will decide and time will give the answer."

Condemning Congress for demanding fair share in the tax sharing, Nikhil said, "Finance Commissions are autonomous bodies and the Central government shares the tax on the basis of commission's recommendation. Congress is just trying to play this up politically to win elections." *—Salar News*

THE PLANK CHALLENGE

Actor Taapsee Pannu during the Plankathon event held at Sri Kanteerava Stadium in Bengaluru on Sunday. Around a thousand volunteers took part in the event **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

GENITAL CANCER PATIENT UNDERGOES SUCCESSFUL SURGERY

KOPPAL, 11 FEB

A team led by Urology Cancer Specialist, Dr Nagaraj, performed a successful laparoscopic radical prostatectomy surgery on a 75-year-old man suffering from genital cancer.

Ramappa, hailing from Vijayapura district, had been struggling with urinary tract infections and excruciating pain for years before seeking treatment at Multi-Specialty Hospital.

Ramappa's symptoms, including frequent urination, intense pain during urination, and urinary blockages, prompted medical investigations revealing genital cancer. Assessing the patient's age and health, Dr Nagaraj and his team accepted the challenge and executed the surgery with precision.

The laparoscopic procedure, termed laparoscopic radical prostatectomy and laparoscopic pelvic lymph node dissection, is a rarity in North Karnataka.

Dr Nagaraj highlighted the advantages of laparoscopy, emphasizing minimal bleeding, pain reduction, and swift recovery compared to traditional open surgery.

The surgical success however, underscores the advancement of medical capabilities in regional healthcare facilities, offering hope and access to cutting-edge treatments for patients in deprived areas. *—Salar News*

INJURED CALF GETS ARTIFICIAL LIMB IN HUBBALLI

HUBBALLI, 11 FEB

Mahaveer Artificial Limb Centre here achieved a remarkable feat by providing artificial limb to a calf that lost part of its left hind leg in a railway accident.Calf's limb was amputated and was later brought to a local gaushala whose staff consulted the veterinary doctors about the possibility of having an artificial limb fitted. After the surgery, the calf can now walk pain-free, said experts.*—PTI*

State declares reclamation of pre-Independence forest leases

MYSURU, 11 FEB

Karnataka's Forest, Environment, and Ecology Minister, EshwarKhnadre, announced the State's decision to reclaim approximately 7,500 acres of forest land that had been leased prior to Independence.

Speaking at a press conference held at Aranya Bhavan in Mysuru, the minister highlighted the predominance of forest land in Chamarajanagar, Mysuru, and Kodagu districts, where around 95 percent of the land had been leased to individuals and industrialists for a period of 99 years. These leased areas have since been transformed into coffee, tea, and rubber plantations.

According to Khnadre, the government has initiated the process to retrieve these forested regions. Despite legal challenges from tenants who claimed leases lasting 999 years, the court upheld the original 99-year lease terms. With the lease periods now expired, approximately 7,500 acres of land belonging to the forest department are slated for return.

To oversee this reclamation effort, a committee has been established headed by senior IFS officer BP Ravi. Ravi, who previously served as the Chief Conservator of Forests in Chamarajanagar, has initiated legal proceedings and will seek counsel from a retired judge.

Khnadre also emphasised the need for joint efforts between the Forest and Revenue Departments to conduct a comprehensive survey on forest encroachments. While acknowledging the complexity of the issue, he projected a completion timeline of six months for the joint survey. *—Salar News*

FM said biggest lie in Parl: Parameshwara

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Nirmala Sitharaman **PHOTO: PTI**

State Home Minister G Parameshwara on Sunday called Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman a liar for claiming in Parliament that all the funds to Karnataka had been cleared.

"Nirmala Sitharaman has told the biggest lie in Parliament. It is sad that an elected Rajya Sabha member from our State has lied. The survey work for drought compensation from the Centre has been completed and still the money has not been released," Parameshwara said.

He also demanded National Disaster Relief Fund money be immediately granted.

Regarding the pending projects of the State, Home Minister said "We are not receiving permission for Mekedatu, Mahadayi and Upper Bhadra. Though Rs 5,300 crore was announced for Upper Bhadra project during the previous budget, the money was never sanctioned. They are not giving us permissions nor the money that they announced. Central government acts like it is our step mother."

Speaking about Home Minister Amit Shah's visit to the State on Sunday, Parameshwara said Shah always comes during elections. Next, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will come. "Let BJP do what they have to do. We will announce the candidates when the time and occasion arises," he said. *—Salar News*

SAVE OUR CITY

Citizens protest against high rise building in Cubbon Park

BENGALURU, 11 FEB

Bengaluru witnessed a strong show of public resistance on Sunday as citizens gathered at Cubbon Park to protest the proposed construction of a 10-storey building by demolishing the existing heritage Karnataka State Bar Council and building.

Organised by the Cubbon Park Walkers Association (CPWA) and supported by environmental groups, the protest drew a diverse crowd united in their Opposition to the project.

Dr S Umesh Kumar, President of the CPWA, told **Salar News** "CubbonPark is not just a park for us. This is a place where people who come to get away from the City's hustles. If this construction takes place, it would not be the same for everyone. There is so much space other than here, why always target the heritage buildings?"

On 8February, the Horticulture Department decided to permit vehicular movement at Cubbon Park on the second and fourth Saturdays, as a trial for three months, reversing the earlier ban on vehicular traffic. The State Government plans to build a 10-story annex for the Karnataka High Court within Cubbon Park.

Members of Cubbon Park Walker's Association, volunteers protest against the approval for the construction of a 10 storeyed building on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

- Concerns voiced by protesters included the environmental impact of construction, and the loss of green cover. Many emphasised the park's importance, stressing that it should be preserved for future generations

The order allows vehicles to enter Cubbon Park from the High Court to Siddalingaiah Circle and vice versa on designated Saturdays, aiming to facilitate traffic flow and public convenience. However, many citizens oppose this move, advocating for the preservation of Cubbon Park as a vehicle-free zone.

Concerns voiced by protesters included the environmental impact of construction, increased traffic congestion, and the loss of green cover. Many emphasised the park's importance as a haven for recreation, exercise, and mental well-being, stressing that it should be preserved for future generations.

"Cubbon Park is not just a park; it's the lungs of our City, a vital sanctuary for both nature and the community. Allowing construction here sets a dangerous precedent, jeopardising the ecological balance and the unique character of this cherished space," said Saroja Rao, a long-time CPWA member.

The protest concluded peacefully. However, CPWA ensured that they will continue their campaign, exploring legal avenues and mobilising public pressure to ensure the park's protection. *—Salar News*

MP Majhi injured in road accident in Odisha

BHUBANESHWAR, 11 FEB

Biju Janata Dal MP Ramesh Chandra Majhi was injured in road accident in Odisha's Nabarangpur district. The accident took place at Dargaguda when Majhi, Nabarangpur MP, along with his driver and PSO (personal security officer) were returning home at Umerkote from Raipur. The vehicle was damaged in the mishap in the early hours of Sunday. However, MP said he only got a scratch mark on his body. The accident may be because the driver dozed off or tyre burst, he said, adding, "I was busy on the phone when the accident took place". "After getting a tetanus injection, I was discharged from hospital. We all are now doing fine", MP said. *—PTI*

Guj min suffers brain stroke, stable says doc

RAJKOT, 11 FEB

Gujarat Agriculture Minister Raghavji Patel has suffered a brain stroke following which he was admitted to a private hospital in Rajkot where his condition was stable, on Sunday. The 65-year-old cabinet minister also holds charge of animal husbandry, fisheries, rural housing and rural development departments in Bhupendra Patel-led state government. "Raghavji Patel suffered from haemorrhage in the right side of his brain at around 10.30 pm on Saturday in Jamnagar. He was given primary treatment at a hospital in Jamnagar from where he was referred to our hospital," Dr Sanjay Tilala, a neurosurgeon at Rajkot's Synergy Hospital, said Raghavji Patel represents Jamnagar (Rural) Assembly constituency. *—PTI*

Kejriwal, Bhagwant Mann to visit Ayodhya on Monday

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann will visit Ayodhya on Monday to pay obeisance at the Ram temple, AAP sources said. The Aam Aadmi Party convener was invited to the 22 January consecration ceremony at the temple but had said that he wanted to visit the temple later with his parents, wife and children."Kejriwal and Mann will be going to Ayodhya tomorrow. They will be accompanied by their families also," a source said on Sunday. *— PTI*

'Do not create border between Punjab & India'

CHANDIGARH, 11 FEB

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Sunday accused Haryana government of creating a border "between Punjab and India", to scuttle farmers' proposed 'Delhi Chalo' march. He said Manohar Khattar-led Haryana government has placed as much barbed wire at the state's borders with Punjab as there is at the country's border with Pakistan. Khattar, however, justified the steps taken by his government to seal the state's borders and stop Punjab farmers from marching towards the national capital, saying the arrangements are aimed at maintaining law and order. Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have announced that more than 200 farm unions would march to Delhi on 13 February to press Centre to accept several demands, including the enactment of a law to guarantee a minimum support price (MSP) for crops."The kind of agitation they do is not right in democracy and we have seen this the last time. There are many buses and trains (to go to Delhi). But they take tractors and also attach some weapons at the front side of the tractors and if somebody asks them to stop, they will not stop," Khattar added. Haryana Police have also installed iron sheets along the two sides of the road on Ghaggar flyover near Ambala to prevent protesters from throwing police barricades off it. Water cannons and Vajra vehicles have been stationed near Shambhu border. *—PTI*

Congress MLAs to stay at Tejashwi's home till trust vote

NDA is comfortably placed, with combined strength of 128 MLAs

PATNA, 11 FEB

With less than 24 hours left for the crucial trust vote in Bihar, legislators of the Congress, who had been made to camp in Telangana for a week, are all set to return by Sunday evening, party sources said.

They said the party legislators' flight is expected to land at the Patna airport by 5 pm and they will drive straight to the residence of former Deputy Chief Minister and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav.

The Congress legislators will be staying, until Monday, with their counterparts from RJD and the Left, at 5, Deshratna Marg, the government bungalow allotted to Yadav when he was the Deputy Chief Minister .

The 'Mahagathbandhan', as the Congress, RJD and Left combine is known in local parlance, lost power less than a month ago as a result of JD(U) President and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's abrupt return to the BJP-led NDA.

The NDA is comfortably placed, having a combined strength of 128 MLAs in the 243-member state assembly.

Nonetheless, the Congress, which has only 19 MLAs, was plagued by fears of a split ahead of the trust vote, a reason why it may have chosen to transport its legislators to the southern state.

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav **PHOTO: PTI**

Meanwhile, RJD legislators, who had reached Yadav's home on Saturday for a luncheon, but were asked to stay back till the trust vote, seem to be enjoying a carnival-like atmosphere.The party has shared a video of them sitting around a bonfire and Yadav, dressed in a tracksuit, applauding a young MLA who crooned a song while playing the guitar.

RJD ready to fight it out in Bihar assembly on Speaker's removal: Manoj Jha Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) on Sunday made it clear that it will give no walkover to the ruling NDA in Bihar a day later when the assembly is scheduled to take up a no-confidence motion against Speaker Awadh Bihari Chaudhary.RJD national spokesman and Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha, whose party has been claiming that Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's volte face has caused resentment in the JD(U), urged legislators to vote during the motion in accordance with their conscience."Tomorrow, the MLAs would have to choose between two Gandhis. One is just an image inscribed on currency notes. The other was a living epitome of truth who had uttered the name of Lord Ram upon being felled by an assassin's bullets", Jha said with a rhetorical flourish. Waving a few sheets of paper which he claimed were Supreme Court's orders on removal of an assembly Speaker passed earlier, the RJD leader said, "Going by these judgements, a no-confidence motion in the Bihar assembly must be supported by at least 122 MLAs in the 243-member assembly. We will ensure that the voting tomorrow is held within the Constitutional framework. We wish the NDA all the best.".Notably, the NDA, which includes the JD(U), the BJP, former CM Jitan Ram Manjhi's HAM and an Independent, has a combined strength of 128 as against 114 MLAs of the 'Mahagathbandhan', which comprises RJD, Congress and three Left parties.Jha's declamation comes in the wake of speculations that Chaudhary, who has so far refused to step down, might do so on Monday without in order to avoid the embarrassment of being voted out. As per the business agenda released by the Vidhan Sabha secretariat, the no-confidence motion against the Speaker will be taken up immediately after the governor's customary address to members of the bicameral legislature on the inaugural day of the budget session. *—PTI*

AHEAD OF POLLS

Journalist Sagarika Ghose will contest Rajya Sabha elections for TMC **PHOTO: X**

TMC announces Sagarika, Sushmita Dev for RS polls

KOLKATA, 11 FEB

Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Sunday announced the names of journalist Sagarika Ghose, party leader Sushmita Dev and two others for the upcoming Rajya Sabha polls from the state.

Elections to the five Rajya Sabha seats from West Bengal will be held on 27 February. "We are pleased to announce the candidature of @sagarikaghose, @SushmitaDevAITC, @MdNadimulHaque6 and Mamata Bala Thakur for the forthcoming Rajya Sabha elections", the party posted on X."We extend our heartfelt wishes to them and may they work towards upholding Trinamool's enduring legacy of indomitable spirit and advocacy for the rights of every Indian", it said. While Nadimul Haque, a two-time Rajya Sabha MP, finds himself back in the limelight, the decision not to renominate three sitting MPs — Subhasish Chakraborty, Abir Biswas, and Santanu Sen — marks a notable shift in the party's strategy.

Ghose, a renowned journalist, is yet to officially join the TMC. Former Congress leader Dev, who had joined the TMC in 2021, has been the party's Rajya Sabha MP from October 2021 to August 2023, after TMC leader Manas Bhunia vacated the seat to join the West Bengal cabinet.

However, the nomination that's captured significant attention is that of former Lok Sabha MP Mamata Bala Thakur. *—PTI*

Friends turned foes slug it out in Tamil Nadu poll battle

CHENNAI, 11 FEB

Ahead of Lok Sabha polls in Tamil Nadu, BJP and AIADMK are locked in a rancorous war in a charged up poll battle.

The ruling DMK has initiated talks with its allies on seat-sharing and is gearing up to bring out its poll manifesto.

Though a multi-cornered contest appears imminent, as of now, the political parties barring DMK and allies are still hazy on alliance.

While former Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami sees red at the mention of DMK president and Chief Minister MK Stalin, the loose cannons in his AIADMK devote more time on personally targeting Annamalai and sustain themselves in the limelight.

"Much of their ire is due to BJP's preference for former Chief Minister O Panneerselvam as a reliable ally than to AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami," a senior BJP leader said.

Ahead of Lok Sabha polls in Tamil Nadu, BJP and AIADMK are locked in a rancorous war in charged up poll battle **PHOTO: PTI**

BJP has never been comfortable in the company of ambitious Palaniswami, who in a bid to garner the minority's votes has expressed opposition to Uniform Civil Code.

Another cause for heartburn for AIADMK was the shifting of loyalties by 12 of its former legislators and a MP, recently, to BJP. A former MLA each from DMK, Congress and DMDK, also joined BJP.

Both Dravidian majors too have been welcoming a steady trickle of workers from other parties, as it is election time.

Though Congress, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi and Left parties have a presence in certain pockets in the state. *—PTI*

'DON'T EAT IF PARENTS DON'T VOTE FOR ME'

MUMBAI, 11 FEB

An MLA of Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena has courted controversy by asking children not to eat for two days if their parents don't vote for him.

Kalamnuri MLA Santosh Bangar's remarks came less than a week after Election Commission issued directives against the use of children in poll-related activities.

Bangar's remarks have prompted leaders from Congress and Sharad Pawar-led NCP to seek action against him.

NCP-SP spokesperson Clyde Crasto said, "What Bangar told the school children goes against the directive of Election Commission, therefore, strict action must be taken against him. He is a repeat offender and goes scot-free as he is an ally of BJP. The Commission must act against him without prejudice."

Bangar is known for his shocking remarks and actions, which have been the subject of much controversy in the past.

Last month, he said he would hang himself if Narendra Modi did not return as Prime Minister after 2024 Lok Sabha election.

In August last year, he was booked by Kalamnuri police for allegedly brandishing a sword during a festive rally.

In 2022, a video of him slapping a catering manager of a midday meal programme for labourers had gone viral. *—PTI*

AYODHYA VISIT

Yogi Adityanath with Deputy Chief Ministers KP Maurya and Brajesh Pathak, UP Assembly Speaker Satish Mahana and state legislators during a visit to Ram Temple, in Ayodhya, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

'Bharat Ratna to Karpoori for Bihar votes'

MUMBAI, 11 FEB

Narendra Modi government has conferred Bharat Ratna on former Bihar chief minister Karpoori Thakur to get votes from eastern state in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray said on Sunday.

Addressing a gathering of Shiv Sena workers, Thackeray claimed Bharatiya Jana Sangh, which was the forerunner of BJP, had opposed Thakur's decision to give 26 per cent reservation to backward classes in government jobs.

BJP announced Dr S Swaminathan's name for Bharat Ratna but has failed to implement the recommendation made by a commission headed by him on increasing farm income, Thackeray further added. The Union government announced five names for the Bharat Ratna, the country's highest civilian award, this year. They are former prime ministers PV Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh, agriculture scientist and father of India's food revolution Dr S Swaminathan, Karpoori Thakur, a champion of backward empowerment, and BJP stalwart LK Advani.At five, one more than the four announced in 1999, this is the maximum number of Bharat Ratnas announced for a year. *—PTI*

POST TMC-CONG BREAK UP

BJP bets on CAA for seats in WB

KOLKATA, 11 FEB

Struggling to gain political traction on issues of corruption, West Bengal BJP is shifting its focus to emotive topics such as the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in a bid to achieve its target of securing 35 out of the 42 Lok Sabha seats from the state.

BJP's strategy is buoyed by the decision of Trinamool Congress to contest alone in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal, breaking away from INDIA bloc in the state.

"Both inauguration of Ram Temple and implementation of CAA are core issues of the party," Agnimitra Paul, BJP state general secretary said.

CAA, enacted by BJP-led central government in 2019, seeks to grant Indian citizenship to persecuted non-Muslim migrants, including Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis, and Christians, from Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan who entered India before 31 December, 2014.

PHOTO: X

- BJP's strategy is buoyed by the decision of Trinamool Congress to contest alone in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections in West Bengal, breaking away from INDIA bloc in the state

Union Minister and Matua leader Shantanu Thakur had recently said CAA will be implemented soon, amidst reports that rules of the legislation would be framed before Lok Sabha polls.While BJP aims for over 35 seats, insiders indicate a more pragmatic goal of 24.

Speaking on the issue of BJP resorting back to Ram Mandir and CAA to win the election in the state, party leaders said it reflects an "acknowledgement of organisational challenges and a desire to counter Trinamool's narrative of Bengali sub-nationalism".

TMC has fanned 'Bengali pride' and had created a poll narrative of sub-nationalism to counter BJP's identity politics in 2021 assembly polls.

The party also pointed out that the break-up of INDIA bloc in Bengal with TMC deciding to fight alone will further help in consolidation of the anti-TMC votes in BJP's account.

Political analyst Maidul Islam suggested that BJP's reliance on emotive issues stems from its organisational weaknesses. *—PTI*

Cleric Azhari gets bail in 'hate speech' case

BHUJ, 11 FEB

A court in Gujarat's Kutch district on Sunday granted bail to Mumbai-based Islamic preacher Mufti Salman Azhari in a second "hate speech" case.

The case was registered against him in connection with a religious event organised at Samakhiali town of the district around two weeks back.

Islamic Preacher Mufti Salman Azhari **PHOTO: PTI**

Cleric was granted bail by a court of Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) Y Sharma at Bhachau, Samakhiali.

After being granted bail, Azhari was taken to the Rajkot central jail from where the Arvalli police will take his custody in a third "hate speech" case registered against him at Modasa police station on Friday.

A day after getting bail by the Bhachau court, he was arrested by Kutch police in connection with an alleged inflammatory speech during a religious event at Samakhiari on 31 January. *—PTI*

EC SNATCHED NCP FROM HANDS OF ITS FOUNDERS: SHARAD PAWAR

PUNE, 11 FEB

Senior politician Sharad Pawar on Sunday said Election Commission's decision to allot NCP name and symbol to Ajit Pawar-led group was "surprising" as the poll body has "snatched" the party from the hands of its founders and gave it to others.

He also said the programme and ideology are important for the people while a symbol is useful for a limited period.

In a setback to Sharad Pawar, EC on 6 February recognised Ajit Pawar faction as the real Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and also allotted the party symbol 'clock' to the group led by him.Pawar, who had served as Chief Minister of Maharashtra and also as union minister, recalled that he had contested his first election on the symbol of 'a pair of bullocks'.EC had said that its decision followed the laid-out tests of maintainability of such a petition. *—PTI*

FOR RS ELECTION

BJP announces candidates for various states

NEW DELHI, 11 FEBRUARY

Bharatiya Janata Party on Sunday announced candidates for the upcoming Rajya Sabha Biennial Elections to be held in various states.

The BJP has fielded Dharmsheela Gupta and Bhim Singh from Bihar and Raja Devendra Pratap Singh from Chhattisgarh.

Subhash Barala will contest from Haryana, Narayana Krishanasa Bhandage from Karnataka, Mahendra Bhatt from Uttarakhand and Samik Bhattacharya from West Bengal.

RPN Singh, Sudhanshu Trivedi, Chaudhary Tejveer Singh, Sadhna Singh, Amarpal Maurya, Sangita Balwant and Navin Jain will fight from Uttar Pradesh.

Meanwhile, a total of 58 Rajya Sabha members--including eight Central Ministers, former prime minister Manmohan Singh and BJP national President JP Nadda--will retire by the first week of May this year.

Narayana Krishanasa Bhandage from Karnataka **PHOTO: PTI**

Mansukh Mandaviya, Bhupender Yadav, Parshottam Rupala, Dharmendra Pradhan, V Murleedharan, Narayan Rane, Rajeev Chandrashekhar and Ashwini Vaishnaw are the eight ministers who will retire by 2-3 April.

Among those retiring are 28 MPs from the BJP, 11 from Congress, four from Trinamool Congress, four from Bharat Rashtra Samithi, two each from Biju Janata Dal, Rashtriya Janata Dal and Janata Dal (United), and one each from YSRCP, Shiv Sena, NCP, Telugu Desam Party, and Sikkim Democratic Front.

Samajwadi Party's Jaya Bachchan, BJP's Anil Baluni and Prakash Javadekar, and BJD's Amar Patnaik are among those leaders retiring from the Rajya Sabha. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Minor girl allegedly raped, killed, in UP mustard field

ETAH, 11 FEB

A day after a seven-year-old girl went missing in a village here, police on Sunday recovered her body from a field, while her family members alleged that she was raped before being killed, officials said. Senior Superintendent (SSP) Rajesh Kumar Singh said prima facie it appeared that the girl was strangulated to death. Her family members have alleged that she was raped before the murder, Singh said. According to the SSP, information was received at the Kotwali Dehat Police Station around 8.30pm on Saturday that a seven-year-old girl was missing since 12 noon from her house in a village here. Quoting the family members, Singh said the girl had gone out around 12pm to play with her friends. After she did not return for a long time, her family members approached the police. A missing complaint was lodged and Police team launched a hunt wita dog squad, SSP said. *—PTI*

IndiGo flight misses taxiway after landing at Delhi

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

An IndiGo aircraft from Amritsar missed the taxiway after landing at the Delhi airport on Sunday morning, leading to blocking of one of the runways for around 15 minutes, according to a source.The A320 aircraft, operating flight 6E 2221, went to the dead end of the runway 28/10 after missing the designated taxiway at the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA).The source said that due to the incident, the runway was blocked for around 15 minutes and impacted some flight operations.Later, an IndiGo towing van towed the aircraft from the dead end of the runway to a parking bay, the source added.Comments from IndiGo on the incident are awaited. *—PTI*

5-year-old boy killed in celebratory firing in UP

BANDA, 11 FEB

A five-year-old boy was killed in a celebratory firing here, police said.The incident took place in Banda district's Mataundh area. ASP Lakshmi Niwas Mishra said, "A minor boy Shambhu Shukla who had gone to attend a family function was killed in a celebratory firing on Saturday evening.""The firing was done with a country-made pistol by one Prateek Shukla during the family function," said the officer.Police have lodged an FIR against the accused. *—PTI*

Husband booked over acid attack on wife

THANE, 11 FEB

The Navi Mumbai police have registered a case against a man for allegedly throwing acid on his wife following an argument, an official said Sunday.The police on Saturday registered a case under section 326(a) (causing grievous hurt by use of acid) of the Indian Penal Code, the official said. The accused, Ramzan Siddiqu Gazi, allegedly threw acid on his wife Amina Khatun,28, after a heated argument at their home in Panvel on 20 January, he said.The victim, who suffered injuries to her face, is undergoing treatment at her hometown in West Bengal, he said.She lodged a complaint with the Baniapukur police in West Bengal, and the case was transferred to Panvel taluka police, the official said, adding that no arrest has been made in the case so far. *—PTI*

Gulmarg witnesses tourist surge after late snowfall

The lack of snow during peak winter left tourism disappointed

GULMARG ,11 FEB

For Russian tourist Andrew, the wait for snowfall to try his skiing skills on the slopes of Apharwat in this famous ski resort of north Kashmir was worth it.

The picturesque Gulmarg, known for its breathtaking landscapes and world-class skiing slopes, has become a hotspot for adventure seekers and nature enthusiasts' alike after the recent snowfall that ended over two months of dry spell.

The lack of snow during peak winter left the people connected with tourism disappointed as winter sports lovers waited eagerly to see the locale turned white which finally happened towards the end of January, bringing cheers on the faces of both the locals and the tourists.

"It's big pleasure to ski here. In my country, we have similar landscapes but not such high mountains.

However, here it is something new, something different like the culture, the view and higher peaks," Andrew, who is in his late 30's, told PTI here.

With the arrival of fresh snow, tourists from far and wide are flocking to Gulmarg PHOTO: PTI

Andrew lamented that he had to face disappointment and put his visit to the Valley on hold in view of the prolonged dry weather conditions and snow-less mountains.

With the arrival of fresh snow, tourists from far and wide are flocking to Gulmarg to experience the thrill of skiing down the powdery slopes and revel in the serene beauty of the snow-covered mountains.

According to the tourism department, the destination witnessed a staggering influx of 19,532 tourists within just six days of February after the fresh bout of snow.

Cold wave conditions in Himachal, 130 roads remain blocked

Cold wave conditions persisted in parts of Una, Kangra and Bilaspur districts of Himachal Pradesh on Sunday despite a dry weather, while fog disrupted visibility in many areas, according to the meteorological department here.

A total of 130 roads, including three national highways, in the state remained closed on Sunday morning, while 62 transformers and five water supply schemes were disrupted, according to the state emergency operation centre.

A maximum of 68 roads are closed in tribal Lahaul and Spiti, 25 in Kullu, 14 in Mandi, 13 in Chamba, nine in Shimla and one in Kangra district.

Punjab, Haryana under cold weather conditions

Cold weather conditions continued in Punjab and Haryana on Sunday with minimum temperatures hovering below the normal levels at several places.

Bathinda was the coldest in Punjab recording a low of 4.4 degrees Celsius, a notch below the season's average, according to the India Meteorological Department's (IMD). *—PTI*

Unseasonal rain, hailstorms hit crops in Vidarbha

Mumbai, 11 Feb

Maharashtra's Vidarbha region has received unseasonal rainfall along with hailstorms, affecting various crops including cotton, an official said on Sunday.Nagpur, Yavatmal, Wardha and Amaravati districts in the Vidarbha region reported heavy spells of showers followed by gusty winds and hailstorms on Saturday.The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had issued a forecast of unseasonal rains in the area on Saturday.

said.The MeT department has issued a 'yellow alert' for most parts of Vidarbha on Sunday. *—PTI*

HALDWANI VIOLENCE

Four companies, containing about 100 personnel each of Central Paramilitary Forces have been sought PHOTO: ANI

U'khand govt seeks additional central forces

HALDWANI, 11 FEB

- Uttarakhand government has sought more central forces for deployment in Haldwani

Uttarakhand government has sought more central forces for deployment in Haldwani where violence erupted on 8 February after demolition of an "illegal" madrassa.

They said four companies, containing about 100 personnel each of Central Paramilitary Forces have been sought from Home Ministry to maintain law and order in Banbhoolpura area, the epicentre of the mob violence.

The requisition was sent to Centre by Chief Secretary Radha Raturi.

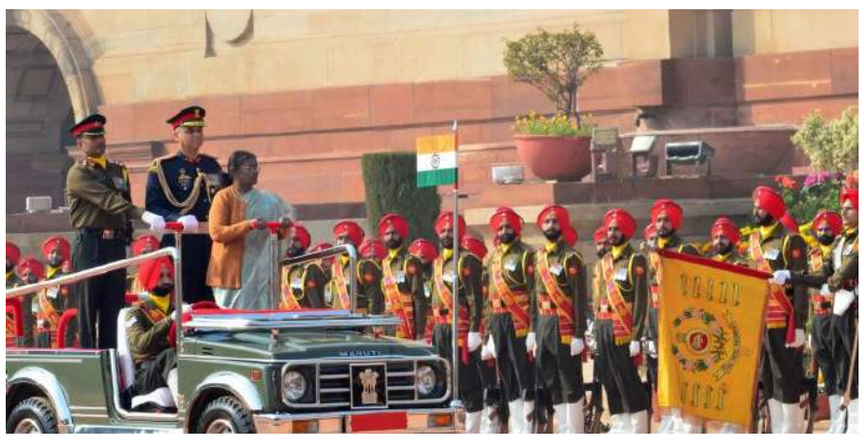
Curfew remains in force in Banbhoopura area but has been lifted from the outer areas of the town. Nearly 1,100 security personnel are already deployed in the town.

Shops are still shut in Banbhoolpura and the roads deserted.

Internet services also continue to be suspended in the area to prevent rumour-mongering through social media platforms.

Six rioters were killed while 60 people were injured in Thursday's violence, officials said. *—PTI*

IN RASHTRAPATI BHAVAN



President Droupadi Murmu during the ceremonial change-over of the Army Guard Battalion stationed at Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi, on Sunday PHOTO: PTI

ASSAM 1ST TO DELIVER OVER 1 CR AYUSHMAN CARDS, CLAIMS CM

GUWAHATI, 11 FEB

Assam has become the first state in the country to deliver more than one crore Ayushman cards, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday.Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri-Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) scheme provides health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year.

"We have become the 1st State to deliver more than one crore Ayushman cards to our people," he added. *—PTI*

- Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri-Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) scheme provides health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year

Ker to form inter-state panel to monitor wildlife movement

THRISSUR, 11 FEB

A day after a 42-year-old man was trampled to death by a wild elephant at Wayanad's Mananthavady, Kerala government decided to form an inter-state coordination committee to monitor the movement of wild animals across state borders.

State Forest Minister AK Saseendran, after an evaluation meeting held, told that Wayanad district, which has been witnessing higher number of man-animal conflicts recently, will receive two more Rapid Response Teams (RRT) in addition to the one it has now.

He added that of the 500 beat forest officers from today's passing out parade, 170 will be posted in Wayanad.

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Minister also informed that the elephant which trampled Payyampally resident Aji, was currently somewhere near Kerala-Karnataka border.

He said forest department officials have been directed to tranquilise the animal if it was found in a suitable place.

To control the man-animal conflict, which includes the venturing of wild animals into human habitat, amendments need to be made to the concerned Forest Act, which only the union government can do.

Meanwhile, BJP leader and Union Minister of State V Muraleedharan on Sunday sought the resignation of state Forest Minister.

He alleged that despite the presence of a radio collar, Kerala Forest Department failed to warn the people about the venturing of the wild elephant.

Locals alleged that the elephant had crossed Kerala border from Karnataka and reached Kuruvadweep locality near here early in the morning but the Forest department had failed to announce this and warn the people from venturing out. *—ANI*

Third offshore campus of IIT likely to be set up in Sri Lanka

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

The third offshore campus of the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) is likely to be set up in Sri Lanka. The proposal for an IIT in Sri Lanka was announced last November in 2024 Budget unveiled by Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe, who also serves as finance minister.

Indian government had announced that opportunities for admission to IITs in India will be provided to meritorious Sri Lankan students from the 2017-18 academic sessions onwards.

The institute had last year announced the setting up of an offshore campus in Tanzania's Zanzibar with Preeti Aghalyam being appointed the director-in-charge who also became the first woman IIT Director.MoU, signed last July between India and Tanzania, was the final procedural step that paved the way for the opening of the campus.

The institute had last year announced the setting up of an offshore campus in Tanzania's Zanzibar PHOTO: PTI

The institute began functioning in November last year from a temporary campus and is offering two full-time academic programmes — a four-year Bachelor of Science in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence and a two-year Master of Technology in Data Science and Artificial Intelligence.IIT Delhi followed the league and signed a formal agreement with UAE government to set up a campus in Abu Dhabi.UK is also keen on welcoming an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) to set up an offshore campus in the country and some UK universities are already in talks with IITs to explore the possibility. *—PTI*

Unique bank where money doesn't matter

AYODHYA, FEB 11

There is a unique bank here in the land of Lord Ram where money does not matter and the only return its 35,000 account-holders get is peace of mind, faith and spirituality!

Catching the attention of the devotees and tourists visiting the newly constructed Ram temple is "International Shree Sitaram Bank". The deposits here are booklets with "Sitaram" scribbled on all pages.

The spiritual bank, which was set up in November 1970 by Mahant Nritya Gopal Das, chief of the Shri Ramjanmabhoomi Teertha Kshetra Trust, has over 35,000 account-holders in India and abroad including US, UK, Canada, Nepal, Fiji, UAE and other countries.

- The bank has a collection of 20,000 crore 'Sitaram' booklets from devotees of Lord Ram.There are 136 branches of the bank across India and even abroad

The bank has a collection of 20,000 crore 'Sitaram' booklets from devotees of Lord Ram.

According to Punit Ram Das Maharaj, manager of the bank, the number of daily visitors at the bank has increased after the consecration ceremony of the grand temple last month.

"The bank provides free booklets and red pens to devotees and keeps track of each account. One has to write 'Sitaram' at least 5 lakh times to get an account opened in the bank and then a passbook is issued."

There are 136 branches of the bank across India and even abroad.

The account holders also send us the booklets by post and we maintain the ledger here," Puneet said.

A new idol of Lord Ram was consecrated at the grand temple in a consecration ceremony on 22 January led by Modi. *—PTI*

5 KILLED, 15 INJURED IN TWO ACCIDENTS IN ODISHA

BHUBANESWAR / BHADRAK, 11 FEB

At least five people were killed and 15 others injured in two separate road accidents in Odisha on Sunday. In the first incident, four people were killed and nine injured when a pick-up van carrying them collided head-on with a truck on NH-49 near Lakhanpur in Jharsuguda district around 10.30 am, a police officer said.The coal-laden truck overturned after hitting the pick-up van.Later, the seriously injured were shifted to the district headquarters hospital, Jharsuguda. *—PTI*

Man giving death threats to gangster's wife arrested

PUNE, 11 FEB

- The cyber police had arrested Marshal Louis Lilakar,24, on Friday, the official said. Lilakar allegedly sent death threats to Swati Mohol under the name of Munna Polekar

A man arrested for allegedly giving death threats to Swati Mohol, wife of slain gangster Sharad Mohol, escaped from a hospital in Pune where the police had taken him for a check-up on Sunday, an official said.

The cyber police had arrested Marshal Louis Lilakar,24, on Friday, the official said.

Lilakar allegedly sent death threats to Swati Mohol under the name of Munna Polekar on social media, he said.

Following a probe, the police traced the messages to the accused and nabbed him, the official said.

"Lilakar complained of chest pains on Sunday morning, and a team from the cyber police took him to Sassoon General Hospital for medical examination around 8am.

He was taken to the outpatient department, from where he managed to escape," he said.

Teams have been formed to apprehend the accused, and a case has been registered against him at Bundgarden police station, the official said. *—PTI*

BETWEEN 1995 & 2021

'80% of organ transplants were on men'

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

More than 80 per cent of the total 36,640 transplants from dead and living donors between 1995 and 2021 were performed on men, with the government saying it has taken several steps to address the gender disparity in the sphere.

According to government data presented in Lok Sabha on Friday in a written response to a question, Minister of State for Health S P Singh Baghel said that of the total transplants, 29,695 were performed on men and 6,945 on women, which translates to a ratio of about 4:1.

However, the share of women receiving transplants increased from 27.6 per cent in 2019 to nearly 30 per cent in 2022.The answer came in response to a question asked by YSR Congress Party MP Kuruva Gorantla Madhav.

The share of women receiving transplants increased from 27.6 per cent in 2019 to nearly 30 per cent in 2022 PHOTO: PIXABAY

Madhav had asked if the government has taken cognisance of the fact that between 1995 and 2021, four out of five organ recipients have been men in the country and what are the steps taken to address the issue.In his response, Baghel said the government has implemented the National Organ Transplant Programme under which steps have been taken to raise awareness on organ donation. In order to narrow down the trend of gender disparity in organ transplants, the Ministry of Health has been conducting regular awareness and sensitisation sessions, he said.

Activities have been organised on various ethical aspects of organ donation and transplantation for different stakeholders. *—PTI*

Parl panel recommends pluralistic healthcare system

New Delhi, 11 Feb

A parliamentary committee has recommended the Ayush Ministry to collaborate with the Union Ministry of Health to implement measures ensuring that the health workforce comprehends the importance of integrating systems.The collaboration aims to establish a pluralistic health system that caters to the population's diverse needs, the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare said in its report "Review of National Ayush Mission in India", presented in Parliament on Friday.

The committee also suggested incorporating the awareness of Ayush systems into school curricula, a significant step towards minimising knowledge barriers between Ayush and modern medicine. *—PTI*

CARNIVAL PARADE

A dancer from the Vai-Vai samba school performs during a Carnival parade in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Saturday as part of the Annual festival. It marks the beginning of Lent, the forty-day period before Easter. ***PHOTO: PTI***

Putin likely to be in power longer than anyone

RUSSIA ELECTIONS

Vladimir Putin has been in power since 2000. If he wins again, and he serves his full six-year term, he will have been in power for 30 years, longer than any Russian or Soviet leader since Tsar Peter the Great ***PHOTO: PTI***

Presidential elections will be held in Russia in March. It is inevitable that the incumbent President, Vladimir Putin, will win.

Putin has been in power (whether as President or as Prime Minister) since 2000. If he wins again, and he serves his full six-year term, he will have been in power for 30 years, longer than any Russian or Soviet leader since Tsar Peter the Great (who died in 1721).

Viable Opposition candidates in this election are conspicuous by their absence. A few token figures, largely loyal to Putin, have announced that they are also running.

Of these, only the leader of the Communist party, Nikolai Kharitonov, is likely to garner many votes. In the last presidential election in 2018, the Communist candidate came second to Putin, (12 per cent of the vote compared to Putin's 77 per cent).

Opposition candidates?

Some potential candidates who wanted to stand in opposition to Putin – and in specific opposition to the war in Ukraine – have, on dubious bureaucratic grounds, been refused permission to do so. Notable in this regard is the peace activist Yekaterina Duntsova. But it is a brave candidate who might try and oppose the sitting president in this election.In the past, leading opposition figures in Putin's Russia who stood up to him and who questioned his authority have tended to be dealt with harshly.The liberal Boris Nemtsov was killed, for instance, in 2015 outside the Kremlin (supposedly by agents linked to Putin's FSB). And other leading Putin critics such as Alexei Navalny and Mikhail Khodorkovsky have been sent to jail in Siberia.Navalny remains incarcerated, but Khodorkovsky is now in exile in London. Thus, it is probably in the best interests of Duntsova's health that her name does not appear on any ballot papers.

Putin needs the election to be seen as "clean" as a means of cementing his legacy as Russian state leader. He does not want history to remember him as a leader who could only remain in power as a dictator.

And it seems that he will be re-elected by a clear majority of the Russian people. As leader, Putin has regularly been recorded as enjoying popular support. He recently had an 80per cent approval rating.The caveat is, of course, that the state-sponsored Russian media has always backed Putin and painted him in a very flattering light. Also, in recent years, and especially since the 2022 war in Ukraine began, any news outlets that were critical of either Putin or more widely of state policy have been severely clamped down on or even forced out of the country. Russia has a media that is now totally in Putin's hands.

Putin also needs to win, and win handsomely, to ward off any challenges to his rule from within his supposed power base. Since coming to power, he has developed a significant web of patronage links involving people in the various "power ministries" and senior political figures, oligarchs and military leaders.In essence, they all rely for their own leading – and wealth-creating – positions on the fact that Putin's hand remains steady on the Russian state tiller.

But if the electorate appears to decide that Putin does not enjoy their popular support – and that he is therefore a weak leader – then a significant number of those people in positions of power – the "siloviki" (strongmen) – may feel that they have to act. They may want to unseat him in order to retain the state stability that serves their interests.

Putin's future

In 2011, thousands of protestors came out onto the streets of Moscow and St Petersburg after seemingly fraudulent elections. Putin was rattled. State stability was under threat.He cannot allow the same thing to happen again. So, despite all the temptations, he needs to keep this forthcoming Presidential election as seemingly "free" and fair as possible.While Putin does appear now to enjoy a high degree of popularity in Russia (albeit largely media-engineered), this may not last.

The war in Ukraine drags on and it will demand continuing losses of both Russian blood and treasure. Most specifically, the war will require the commitment of more and more Russian men.

Another wave of – deeply unpopular – mobilisation is inevitable.The massive costs of the war will put pressure on social welfare spending. And taxes will rise, as will inflation. The sanctions' regime imposed on Moscow by the west will serve to undermine much of the Russian economy. Times will become harder for ordinary Russians and Putin will inevitably be blamed.

He may win these presidential elections in March, but just how long he can remain in power, given the unavoidable demands of the coming months, may be uncertain.

Courtesy, The Conversation

SALAR ساڈا

Emotions that make us feel bad can be useful

Remember the sadness that came with the last time you failed miserably at something? Or the last time you were so anxious about an upcoming event that you couldn't concentrate for days?These types of emotions are unpleasant to experience and can even feel overwhelming. A recent research is revealing that emotions can be useful, and even negative emotions can bring benefits.The studies and many others have shown that emotions aren't uniformly good or bad for people. Instead, different emotions can result in better outcomes in particular types of situations.

Sadness can help you recover from a failure

Sadness occurs when people perceive that they've lost a goal or a desired outcome, and there's nothing they can do to improve the situation. Once evoked, sadness is associated with what psychologists call a deactivation state of doing little, without much behavior or physical arousal. Sadness also brings thinking that is more detailed and analytical. It makes you stop and think.The benefit of the stopping and thinking that comes with sadness is that it helps people recover from failure. When you fail, that typically means the situation you're in is not conducive to success.

Instead of just charging ahead in this type of scenario, sadness prompts people to step back and evaluate what is happening.

When people are sad, they process information in a deliberative, analytical way and want to avoid risk. This mode comes with more accurate memory, judgment that is less influenced by irrelevant assumptions or information, and better detection of other people lying. These cognitive changes can encourage people to understand past failures and possibly prevent future ones.

Anger prepares you to overcome an obstacle

Anger occurs when people perceive they're losing a goal or desired outcome, but that they could improve the situation by removing something that's in their way. The obstacle could be an injustice committed by another person, or it could be a computer that repeatedly crashes while you're trying to get work done. Once evoked, anger is associated with a "readiness for action," and your thinking focuses on the obstacle.

The benefit of being prepared for action and focused on what's in your way is that it motivates you to overcome what's standing between you and your goal. When people are angry, they process information and make judgments rapidly, want to take action, and are physiologically aroused. Expressing anger, facially or verbally, has the benefit of prompting other people to clear the way. People are more likely to concede in negotiations and give in on issues when their adversary looks or says they are angry.

Anxiety helps you prepare for danger

Anxiety occurs when people perceive a potential threat. This could be giving a speech to a large audience where failure would put your self-esteem on the line, or it could be a physical threat to yourself or loved ones. Once evoked, anxiety is associated with being prepared to respond to danger, including increased physical arousal and attention to threats and risk. Being prepared for danger means that if trouble brews, you can respond quickly to prevent or avoid it. Anxiety prepares the body for action, which improves performance on a number of tasks that involve motivation and attention. It motivates people to prepare for upcoming events, such as devoting time to study for an exam. Anxiety also prompts protective behavior, which can help prevent the potential threat from becoming a reality.

Boredom can jolt you out of a rut

Boredom appears to occur when someone's current situation is not causing any other emotional response. There are three situations where this lack can occur: when emotions fade, such as the happiness of a new car fading to neutral; when people don't care about anything in their current situation, such as being at a large party where nothing interesting is happening; or when people have no goals. Also, someone with a goal of relaxation might feel quite content sitting quietly with no stimulation.Psychology researchers think that the benefit of boredom in situations where people are not responding emotionally is that it prompts making a change. If nothing in your current situation is worth responding to, the aversive experience of boredom can motivate you to seek new situations or change the way you're thinking. Boredom has been related to more risk seeking, a desire for novelty, and creative thinking.

Using the toolkit of emotion

People want to be happy. But research is finding that a satisfying and productive life includes a mix of positive and negative emotions. Negative emotions, even though they feel bad to experience, can motivate and prepare people for failure, challenges, threats and exploration.

Pleasant or not, your emotions can help guide you toward better outcomes. Maybe understanding how they prepare you to handle various situations will help you feel better about feeling bad.

Courtesy, The Conversation

The study shows that emotions aren't uniformly good or bad for people. Instead, different emotions can result in better outcomes in particular types of situations ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

What does slowing down of Atlantic Ocean's circulation means?

Studies suggest that the circulation has reached a dangerous tipping point in the past that sent it into a precipitous, unstoppable decline, and that it could hit that tipping point again as the planet warms and glaciers and ice sheets melt ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Superstorms, abrupt climate shifts and New York City frozen in ice. That's how the blockbuster Hollywood movie "The Day After Tomorrow" depicted an abrupt shutdown of the Atlantic Ocean's circulation and the catastrophic consequences.The 2004 movie raised a serious question: If global warming shuts down the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation, which is crucial for carrying heat from the tropics to the northern latitudes, how abrupt and severe would the climate changes be?

Instruments deployed in the ocean starting in 2004 show that the Atlantic Ocean circulation has observably slowed over the past two decades, possibly to its weakest state in almost a millennium. Studies also suggest that the circulation has reached a dangerous tipping point in the past that sent it into a precipitous, unstoppable decline, and that it could hit that tipping point again as the planet warms and glaciers and ice sheets melt.

In a new study using the latest generation of Earth's climate models, we simulated the flow of fresh water until the ocean circulation reached that tipping point.

The results showed that the circulation could fully shut down within a century of hitting the tipping point, and that it's headed in that direction. If that happened, average temperatures would drop by several degrees in North America, parts of Asia and Europe, and people would see severe and cascading consequences around the world.

The ocean's conveyor belt

Ocean currents are driven by winds, tides and water density differences.In the Atlantic Ocean circulation, the relatively warm and salty surface water near the equator flows toward Greenland. During its journey it crosses the Caribbean Sea, loops up into the Gulf of Mexico, and then flows along the US East Coast before crossing the Atlantic.This current, also known as the Gulf Stream, brings heat to Europe. As it flows northward and cools, the water mass becomes heavier. By the time it reaches Greenland, it starts to sink and flow southward. The sinking of water near Greenland pulls water from elsewhere in the Atlantic Ocean and the cycle repeats, like a conveyor belt.

Too much fresh water from melting glaciers and the Greenland ice sheet can dilute the saltiness of the water, preventing it from sinking, and weaken this ocean conveyor belt. A weaker conveyor belt transports less heat northward and also enables less heavy water to reach Greenland, which further weakens the conveyor belt's strength.

What happens to the climate at the tipping point?

The existence of a tipping point was first noticed in an overly simplified model of the Atlantic Ocean circulation in the early 1960s. Today's more detailed climate models indicate a continued slowing of the conveyor belt's strength under climate change. However, an abrupt shutdown of the Atlantic Ocean circulation appeared to be absent in these climate models.

It is that once it reaches the tipping point, the conveyor belt shuts down within 100 years. The heat transport toward the north is strongly reduced, leading to abrupt climate shifts.

The result: Dangerous cold in the North

Regions that are influenced by the Gulf Stream receive substantially less heat when the circulation stops. This cools the North American and European continents by a few degrees.

The European climate is much more influenced by the Gulf Stream than other regions. In our experiment, that meant parts of the continent warmed at more than 5 degrees Fahrenheit (3 degrees Celsius) per decade – far faster than today's global warming of about 0.36 F (0.2 C) per decade. We found that parts of Norway would experience temperature drops of more than 36 F (20 C). On the other hand, regions in the Southern Hemisphere would warm by a few degrees.These temperature changes develop over about 100 years. That might seem like a long time, but on typical climate time scales, it is abrupt.

The conveyor belt shutting down would also affect sea level and precipitation patterns, which can push other ecosystems closer to their tipping points. The Atlantic circulation has slowed significantly in the distant past. During glacial periods when ice sheets that covered large parts of the planet were melting, the influx of fresh water slowed the Atlantic circulation, triggering huge climate fluctuations.

So, when will we see this tipping point?

The big question – when will the Atlantic circulation reach a tipping point – remains unanswered. Observations don't go back far enough to provide a clear result. While a recent study suggested that the conveyor belt is rapidly approaching its tipping point, possibly within a few years, these statistical analyses made several assumptions that give rise to uncertainty.

Instead, we were able to develop a physics-based and observable early warning signal involving the salinity transport at the southern boundary of the Atlantic Ocean. Once a threshold is reached, the tipping point is likely to follow in one to four decades.It might seem counterintuitive to worry about extreme cold as the planet warms, but if the main Atlantic Ocean circulation shuts down from too much meltwater pouring in, that's the risk ahead.

Courtesy, The Conversation

PHOTO: X

Al-Shabab claims attack in Somali that killed 4

DUBAI, 11 FEB

The al-Qaida-linked militant group al-Shabab claimed an attack that killed three Emirati troops and a Bahraini military officer on a training mission at a military base in the Somali capital, authorities said on Sunday. The attack Saturday targeted the troops at the General Gordon Military Base in Mogadishu. Details about the attack and whether it killed others remained scarce Sunday, though Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud offered his condolences to the UAE for the loss of its troops in the assault. Early Sunday, the UAE's state-run WAM news agency reported the killing of three of its troops and the Bahraini soldier in a "terrorist act," without elaborating. It added that the attack wounded two others. Anwar Gargash, a senior Emirati diplomat, offered condolences to those killed and a quick recovery for those wounded in the attack. *—AP*

China warns Sweden against closer Taiwan ties

TAIPEI, 11 FEBRUARY

The Chinese embassy in Sweden warned the Gothenburg City Council as it considered concluding sister city agreements with Taiwan to reduce its reliance on China, Taiwan News reported. Members of two parties at the council in Sweden's second-largest city submitted a motion to expand its foreign relations. However, the move caught the attention of the Chinese embassy in Stockholm, according to the report. The mission sent an e-mail to the Gothenburg City Council, warning it should adhere to the One China principle, Beijing's claim that Taiwan is part of China, the Goteborg Posten reported. The politicians should handle the "Taiwan issue" correctly, as it was at the very core of China's interests, the embassy said.*—ANI*

Iran marks 45th anniversary of Islamic Revolution

TEHRAN, 11 FEB

Iran marked on Sunday the 45th anniversary of the 1979 Islamic Revolution amid tensions gripping the wider Middle East over Israel's continued war on Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Thousands of Iranians marched through major streets and squares decorated with flags, balloons and banners with revolutionary and religious slogans. In Tehran, crowds waved Iranian flags, chanted slogans, and carried placards with the traditional "Death to America" and "Death to Israel" written on them. Some burned US and Israeli flags, a common practice in pro-government rallies. *—AP*

Student killed in Senegal protests over poll postponement

SAINT-LOUIS, 11 FEB

Tensions escalated in Senegal as a student lost his life amidst violent demonstrations protesting the delay of the presidential election in the city of Saint-Louis, reported Al Jazeera Clashes between demonstrators and security forces engulfed Senegal's capital, Dakar and other urban centers on Friday, marking the first widespread unrest following the postponement of the vote, a decision feared to precipitate prolonged instability. According to Al Jazeera, in a statement issued on 10 February, the Ministry of Interior and Public Security acknowledged the death of student Alpha Yero Tounkara and pledged an investigation while refuting accusations against its forces. "The Defence and Security Forces did not intervene to maintain order on the university campus where the death occurred," the statement clarified. *—ANI*

Pakistan courts flooded with petitions challenging polls

Election Commission is still to announce the full results of the polls

ISLAMABAD, 11 FEB

The courts in Pakistan have been flooded with petitions as candidates, mostly backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), challenged the results of Thursday's general elections, alleging rigging.

Most of the petitions were filed in the Lahore High Court (LHC), while two PTI-backed candidates moved the Islamabad High Court (IHC) against the results, and at least three petitions were filed in the Sindh High Court (SHC).

Election Commission is still to announce the full results of the polls. Independents backed by Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party won the lion's share of 102 seats in the National Assembly (NA) in the election.

The group was followed by former prime minister Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) with 74 seats, Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) with 54, Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) with 17 and 12 other seats going to smaller parties, as the result of 259 seats out of 265 was announced by the election commission.

The result of NA-88 was withheld by the ECP due to complaints of fraud and it would be announced after redressing the grievances of the aggrieved. It showed that only five results were pending. The petitions in the LHC challenged the victories of PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz; Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) President Aleem Khan in different constituencies in Lahore.

A vast majority of those filing such challenges were PTI-backed independents, including high-profile politicians such as former Punjab chief minister Parvez Elahi and his wife Qaisera, former Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) finance minister Taimoor Jhagra and ex-Khyber Pakhtunkhwa speaker Mahmood Jan, former Punjab health minister Dr Yasmin Rashid, as well as Usman Dar's mother Rehana Dar. *—PTI*

Supporters of former prime minister Imran Khan chant slogans during a protest against the delaying result of election *PHOTO: PTI*

- EC is still to announce the full results of the polls. Independents backed by Khan's PTI party won the lion's share of 102 seats in the NA in the election

ECP orders to hold re-polling in some places

ISLAMABAD, 11 FEB

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) issued orders to hold re-elections at various polling places nationwide following the verification of complaints regarding the snatching and damaging of voting materials, reported by Geo News.

Having crossed through all challenging phases in conducting nationwide elections on February 8, the poll organising authority is now in the final stages of announcing vote results as the compilation process enters its 48th hour.

According to Geo News, the commission responded to complaints from different parts of the country regarding incidents of snatching and damaging voting material at various polling stations, prompting local election officials to postpone voting processes.

In a recent development, the top electoral body has scheduled re-polling at multiple polling stations on 15 February. Results from these polling stations will be announced upon the completion of the re-polling event. *—PTI*

PTI CHAIRMAN CALLS FOR NATIONWIDE PROTESTS

ISLAMABAD, 11 FEB

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) chairman Barrister Gohar Ali Khan called for peaceful protests across the nation against Returning Officers (ROs) on Sunday, Pakistan-based The Express Tribune reported. He said that the people of Pakistan had complete trust in former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's vision of "slavery unacceptable" in the aftermath of the 8 February polls. He noted that despite the challenges faced on poll day people have showcased a clear and transparent mandate in favour of the PTI. *—ANI*

WAR IS ON

Warning mounts as Israel plans Rafah offensive

Saudi Arabia warned of "very serious repercussions" if Rafah was stormed *PHOTO: PTI*

PALESTINE, 11 FEB

Israel is facing growing international warnings over its planned offensive in Rafah - the city in southern Gaza crammed with Palestinian refugees.

UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron said "over half of Gaza's population are sheltering in the area", while Dutch FM Hanke Bruins Slot said there could be "many civilian casualties". Saudi Arabia warned of "very serious repercussions" if Rafah was stormed. Gaza's Hamas rulers said there could be "tens of thousands" of casualties.

Israel launched its operations in the Palestinian enclave after more than 1,200 people were killed in southern Israel on 7 October by Hamas gunmen. More than 27,900 people have been killed and at least 67,000 injured in Gaza since then, according to the Hamas-run health ministry.

Many Gazans have ended up in Rafah having been forced to flee their homes elsewhere at least once. Saturday's warnings came a day after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered his military to prepare to evacuate civilians from the city ahead of an expanded offensive against Hamas.

"It is impossible to achieve the goal of the war without eliminating Hamas, and by leaving four Hamas battalions in Rafah. It is clear that intense activity in Rafah requires that civilians evacuate the areas of combat," Netanyahu's office said. BBC News *—PTI*

US condemns Trump's comments on NATO

WASHIGNTON, 11 FEB

The White House has condemned Donald Trump's comments suggesting the United States should not help NATO protect allies from a potential Russian attack as "unhinged".

The former United States president, who appeared to be talking about a previous meeting with NATO leaders during his latest political rally in South Carolina on Saturday, claimed he had spoken with the president of "a big country" about allies rushing to defend each other.

"Well sir if we don't pay, and we're attacked by Russia – will you protect us?" he recounted the leader as saying. "I said: 'You didn't pay? You're delinquent?' He said: 'Yes, let's say that happened.' No, I would not protect you. In fact, I would encourage them to do whatever the hell they want. You gotta pay."

"Encouraging invasions of our closest allies by murderous regimes is

PHOTO: BRITANNICA

appalling and unhinged – and it endangers American national security, global stability and our economy at home," said White House spokesperson Andrew Bates. President Joe Biden, who is seeking re-election in November, has empowered the alliance since taking office in 2021, making sure NATO is now "the largest and most vital it has ever been", Bates added.

"Rather than calling for wars and promoting deranged chaos, President Biden will continue to bolster American leadership and stand up for our national security interests – not against them," he said in a statement. *—Al Jazeera*

Hungary President Novak resigns over pardon to man convicted in sex abuse case *PHOTO: GOV.HUNGARY*

Hungary President resigns live on TV

BUDAPEST, 11 FEB

The President of Hungary has resigned live on television over a decision to pardon a man convicted of covering up a child sexual abuse case. It was revealed last week President Novak had given clemency to a man jailed for forcing children to retract sexual abuse claims against a director of a state-run children's home. Protests calling for her to step down had been growing in Hungary.

Novak apologised and said she made "a mistake" in granting the pardon. Judit Varga, the former minister of justice who approved the pardon, has also resigned from her new role leading the European elections campaign for Prime Minister Viktor Orban's ruling Fidesz party.

The controversy which led to the resignations came after the names of 25 people pardoned by Ms Novak in April last year, as part of a visit to Hungary by Pope Francis, were made public by Hungarian media last week.

On the list of convicts was the deputy director of a children's home near Budapest, who had been jailed for three years after forcing children to retract claims of abuse against the director of the home. The director had himself been jailed for eight years over abusing children at the government-run facility.

Hungarian opposition parties and protesters had been demanding her resignation, but Novak's decision to do so was as sudden as it was unexpected. *—BBC News*

SHIFTING THE POWER

Zelenskyy takes command of country's armed forces

KYIV, 11 FEBRUARY

In a long-anticipated move, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has replaced General Valerii Zaluzhnyi as the head of Ukraine's armed forces, marking a significant shift in the country's military leadership amid ongoing tensions with Russia, reported CNN.

Speculation was rife for over a week before Zelenskyy's announcement on 8 February, reflecting the strained relationship between him and Zaluzhnyi over recent months.

The change comes at a crucial moment in the war with Russia, with Ukrainian units facing challenges along various fronts, particularly in the Donetsk and Kharkiv regions. Shortages of ammunition and experienced personnel have added to the complexities faced by Ukrainian forces, as per CNN.

President Zelenskyy acknowledged the need for urgent changes, stating, "The feeling of stagnation in the southern areas and the difficulties in the fighting in the Donetsk region have affected the public mood."

Drone with 22 kilograms of drugs brought down by border guards in Ukraine *PHOTO: UKRAINE BORDER SERVICE*

According to CNN, the appointment of General Oleksandr Syrskyi as Zaluzhnyi's successor signifies a potential shift in Ukrainian military strategy. While Syrskyi is seen as a consensus choice, concerns linger regarding his leadership style and effectiveness.

Syrskyi has been in command of land forces since the Russian invasion but was criticized for extending the defence of Bakhmut at great human cost. Subordinates have described him as lacking empathy and some soldiers took to calling him "General 200" (200 is the military code for killed-in-action.)

Matthew Schmidt, Director of the International Affairs programme at the University of New Haven, says, "Maybe it's a phase in the war where a safe choice is the right move."

Syrskyi faces immediate challenges, including stabilizing the front lines, replenishing depleted ranks, and expediting the delivery of Western munitions to bolster Ukrainian defences. *—PTI*

TRUMP MOCKS HALEY FOR ABSENCE OF HER ARMY HUSBAND

WASHINGTON, 11 FEB

Former US president Donald Trump has mocked his Republican rival Nikki Haley over the absence of her husband, who is deployed overseas, drawing a sharp reaction from the Indian-American politician who said the person who disrespects military families has no business being commander-in-chief.

Haley's husband Major Michael Haley, a commissioned officer with the South Carolina National Guard, is currently on a year-long deployment with the 218th Maneuver Enhancement Bridge, which is providing support in the Horn of Africa. He deployed in June.

The war of words between two Republican presidential candidates started with a Trump rally on Saturday in South Carolina. *—PTI*

Gaza: 6-year-old girl, 2 rescuers found dead

GAZA, 11 FEB

A six-year-old Palestinian girl, Hind Rajab, and two rescuers who went looking for her nearly two weeks ago were found dead on Saturday, The New York Times reported, citing the Palestine Red Crescent.

According to the report, two rescuers with the Red Crescent were dispatched in an ambulance on the evening of January 29 to find the girl, who was believed to be trapped in a vehicle in Gaza city with six dead family members. The aid group claimed they were killed by Israeli fire.

The Red Crescent, in a statement on Saturday, accused Israeli forces of bombing the ambulance as it arrived "just meters away from the vehicle containing the trapped child Hind", killing the two rescuers inside. It said this happened "despite prior coordination" between the Red Crescent and the Israeli military. *—ANI*

Rishi Sunak optimistic about UK re-election

LONDON, 11 FEB

Rishi Sunak *PHOTO: AP*

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has said he is "totally up for the fight" of pitching his policies to the electorate to win another term for the governing Conservative Party as he prepares for a general election expected to take place in the second half of the year.

In an interview with The Times this weekend, the 43-year-old British Indian leader said he had reasons to be optimistic because the economy was "pointing in the right direction" and that the "future is going to be better".

"At the beginning of this year there is a sense that the country is pointing in the right direction," he told the newspaper.

"Because economic conditions have improved, because the plan is working, you are starting to see mortgage rates come down and we have been able to cut taxes. I do believe those pressures are starting to ease and that hopefully over the course of this year, we can continue to make even more progress," he said. In a message as much for the voters as for the rebels within his own Tory ranks, the Conservative leader reiterated his plan to cut taxes for the hardworking people of the country.

"It's because those are my values, those are the values of my party. It's one where hard work should be rewarded. And actually, the best way to express that through the tax system is to cut people's taxes so when they are working hard they get to enjoy more of the rewards of that for themselves and their family," he said. *—PTI*

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RACE

Biden or Trump: US allies have only one fear

LONDON, 11 FEB

As chances rise of a Joe Biden-Donald Trump rematch in the US Presidential election race, America's allies are bracing for a bumpy ride.

Many worry that a second term for Trump would be an earthquake, but tremors already abound — and concerns are rising that the US could grow less dependable regardless of who wins.

With a divided electorate and gridlock in Congress, the next American president could easily become consumed by manifold challenges at home — before even beginning to address flashpoints around the world from Ukraine to the Middle East.

Joe Biden and Donald Trump *PHOTO: PTI*

French President Emmanuel Macron's recent verdict was blunt: America's "first priority is itself." The first Trump administration stress-tested the bonds between the US and its allies, particularly in Europe. Trump derided the leaders of some friendly nations, including Germany's Angela Merkel and Britain's Theresa May, while praising authoritarians such as Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian leader Vladimir Putin. He has called China's Xi Jinping "brilliant" and Hungary's Viktor Orbán "a great leader." In campaign speeches, Trump remains skeptical of organisations such as NATO, often lamenting the billions the US spends on the military alliance whose support has been critical to Ukraine's fight against Russia's invasion.

- Many worry that a second term for Trump would be an earthquake, but tremors already abound — and concerns are rising that the US could grow less dependable regardless of who wins

Biden, in contrast, has made support for Ukraine a key priority and moral imperative.

But Biden's assertion after his election in 2020 that "America is back" on the global stage has not been entirely borne out. Congressional Republicans have stalled more military aid for Ukraine, while America's influence has been unable to contain conflict in the Middle East

Thomas Gift, director of the Centre on US Politics at University College London, said that whoever wins the Presidential race, the direction of travel will be the same – toward a multipolar planet in which the United States is no longer "the indisputable world superpower." Most allied leaders refrain from commenting directly on the US election, sticking to the line that it's for Americans to pick their leader. *—AP*

ONGC Q3 profit falls 14% to ₹9,536cr on lower oil prices

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on Sunday reported 14 per cent drop in net profit for the third quarter ended 31 December as oil and gas prices fell.Standalone net profit of Rs 9,536 crore in October-December 2023 (third quarter of 2023-24 fiscal year) was 13.7 per cent lower than Rs 11,045 crore earning in the same period of previous financial year, the company said in a statement.The earning was lower as price realised for crude oil the firm produced and sold in the quarter fell 6.4 per cent to USD 81.59 per barrel. Gas price too was 24.2 per cent lower at USD 6.5 per mmBtu.Also contributing to lower profit was a decline in production of crude oil, which is converted into fuel like petrol and diesel at refineries, and natural gas which is used to generate electricity, produce fertilizer, turned into CNG and piped to kitchens for cooking.*—PTI*

Ashok Leyland to expand network in North & East

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Heavy commercial vehicle maker Ashok Leyland has drawn up network expansion plans in the North and Eastern parts of the country, a top company official has said.The Hinduja Group flagship company was also gearing up to launch its electric light commercial vehicles (LCVs) within the next few months.Ashok Leyland in the first nine months of the financial year ending December 31, 2023 reported its highest turnover of Rs 27,100 crore, highest sales volume at 1,38,416 units, EBITDA of Rs 3,014 crore and Profit After Tax of Rs 1,718 crore."While we have started doing very well now in the North and East zones which have been traditionally our weaker markets, there is certainly ample headroom to grow further.We are progressing well on our network expansion plans, especially in the North and East zones" company Managing Director Shenu Agarwal said. *—PTI*

MedPlus eyes 50-60% revenue in next 3 yrs

HYDERABAD, 11 FEB

MedPlus Health Services, a retail pharmacy and diagnostics chain in India, is set to elevate its "store generics" (in-house brand) to 50-60 per cent contribution to the firm's revenues in the next two to three years, drawing inspiration from the successful practices of US pharma retail giants like Walgreens and CVS.The concept of "store generics" involves a retail chain exclusively selling its own branded medications alongside innovator drugs. MedPlus currently witnesses around 12 per cent of its revenues from store generics.This strategic move follows the triumphant adoption of the "store generics" model in Telangana and subsequent expansions into Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Odisha, Gangadi Madhukar Reddy, MD CEO of MedPlus said. Over the past six months, MedPlus has witnessed over 26.2 lakh customers saving a substantial Rs. 139.7 crores by opting for MedPlus brands, he said. *—PTI*

Gold Plus Glass Industry files papers with SEBI

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Float glassmaker Gold Plus Glass Industry Ltd has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO).The IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares aggregating up to Rs 500 crore and an offer-for-sale (OFS) of up to 1.56 crore shares by promoters and investor shareholders, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) filed on Saturday.Those selling shares in the OFS are -- Suresh Tyagi, Jimmy Tyagi, PI Opportunities Fund-I and Kotak Special Situations Fund.The Delhi-based company may consider raising Rs 100 crore through a pre-IPO placement. *—PTI*

Petronet deal: Largest gas import contract

LNG from Qatar will support India's clean energy goals

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Petronet renewing a contract to buy 7.5 million tonnes of LNG from Qatar annually from 2029 for 20 years is the largest-ever extension of super-chilled fuel in the world, and will support India's clean energy goals, officials said.

The original 25-year deal was signed in 1999 and supplies started in 2004. Qatar has since then never defaulted on a single cargo and neither did it slap penalties under take-or-pay clause when the Indian firm did not take deliveries because prices were too high, top Petronet officials said.

Supplies under the extended contract would start after Petronet takes deliveries of 52 cargoes it had failed to take in 2015-16 when prices had shot up sharply.

While the volumes in contract have not changed, price changed four times, including the latest one when the contract extension was renegotiated.

The composition of the gas promised to be delivered has also changed. RasGas, which is now QatarEnergy, had originally signed to supply 'rich' or gas containing components of ethane and propane that is used as feedstock in petrochemical complexes.

It supplied 5 Million Tonnes (MT) a year of LNG that contained methane (used to produce electricity, make fertilisers, turned into CNG or used as cooking fuel), as well as ethane and propane on a firm basis and the rest on best endeavour basis.

In the revised contract agreed last week, where the price is also lower, QatarEnergy will supply 'lean' or gas stripped of ethane and propane. But Petronet officials said Qatar will continue to supply 'rich' gas as long as they dont have a facility to utilise ethane and propane.State-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) spent Rs 30,000 crore on building a petrochemical complex at Dahej in Gujarat to use ethane and propane from LNG coming from Qatar, to make products that are used to manufacture plastics to detergents.The new contract price is at about 12.2 per cent of Brent oil. The USD 0.52 per mmBtu of fixed cost has been scrapped and so has the responsibility on part of the Indian firm to ship the LNG.Now QatarEnergy will ship the gas, an exercise that will cost it around USD 0.30 per mmBtu.

- Since entering into a deal with Qatar, Indian firms have signed deals to import LNG from Australia, the US and Russia

Since entering into a deal with Qatar, Indian firms have signed deals to import LNG from Australia, the US and Russia. *—PTI*

Direct tax collection reaches 80 per cent

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Net direct tax collection so far in current fiscal grew 20 per cent year-on-year to Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 80 per cent of revised budget estimates for full fiscal year.

"The provisional figures of direct tax collections continue to register steady growth. Direct tax collections up to 10th February, 2024 show that gross collections are at Rs 18.38 lakh crore, which is 17.30 per cent higher than the gross collections for the corresponding period of last year," Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a statement.

Direct tax collection, net of refunds, till 10 February of FY24 stands at Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 20.25 per cent higher than the net collections in the corresponding period last year.

This collection is 80.23 per cent of the total revised estimates of direct taxes for 2023-24.

Direct tax collection till 10 Feb stands at Rs 15.60 lakh cr, which is 20.25% higher than the same period last year ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

- Direct tax collection, net of refunds, till 10 February of FY24 stands at Rs 15.60 lakh crore, which is 20.25 per cent higher than the net collections in the corresponding period last year

Refunds amounting to Rs 2.77 lakh crore have been issued during 1 April, 2023 to 10 February, 2024.

Gross revenue collections for Corporate Income Tax (CIT) and Personal Income Tax (PIT) also showed a steady growth.

Growth rate for CIT was 9.16 per cent while for PIT, it was 25.67 per cent (PIT only).

After adjustment of refunds, the net growth in CIT collections was 13.57 per cent and that in PIT was 26.91 per cent (PIT only), it added. *— PTI*

FPIs infuse over ₹15K cr in debt market in Feb

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) continued their bullish stance on the country's debt markets with a net infusion of over Rs 15,000 crore so far this month, on the back of inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index along with relatively stable economy.

This followed a net investment of Rs 19,836 crore in January, making it the highest monthly inflow in more than six years. This was the highest inflow since June 2017, when they infused Rs 25,685 crore.

On the other hand, foreign investors pulled out more than Rs 3,000 crore from equities during the period under review. Before this, they withdrew a massive Rs 25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories showed.

Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research, Morningstar Investment Research India, attributed the outflow from equities to the uncertainty surrounding the interest rate environment, both domestically as well as globally.

According to the data, FPIs made a net investment of Rs 15,093 crore in the debt markets in this month (till 9 February).

With this, the total investment by FPIs reached over Rs 34,930 crore in 2024.

They have been injecting money in the debt markets for the past few months.

"The Indian debt markets witnessed a reversal in FPI flow trend last year after the announcement of inclusion of Indian government bonds in the JP Morgan Index. This was one of the major drivers for the robust flows from FPIs, along with relatively stable economy," Srivastava said. . *—PTI*

TruAlt Bioenergy to expand capacity, invest ₹600 crore

MUMBAI, 11 FEB

TruAlt Bioenergy, which is among the largest biofuel players, is planning to expand its capacity by 2.7 lakh litres per day by next fiscal and will invest around Rs 600 crore to set up more plants.

The Bengaluru-based company is also expecting around 30 per cent revenue growth this fiscal year.

TruAlt is primarily into biofuels such as 1G ethanol, 2G ethanol, compressed biogas, sustainable aviation fuel, fermented organic manure, and green hydrogen.It operates five 1G ethanol units with a capacity of 2 million litres per day, making it the country's largest ethanol producer while its compressed biogas capacity is 10 tonne per day.

The company's existing plants are also in Bijapur and Pune. *—PTI*

Bezos sells nearly 12M Amazon shares

SEATTLE, 11 FEB

Jeff Bezos filed a statement with federal regulators indicating his sale of nearly 12 million shares of Amazon stock worth more than USD 2 billion.

He notified the US Securities and Exchange Commission of the sale of 11,997,698 shares of common stock on 7 February and 8 February.

The collective value of the shares of Amazon, which is based in Seattle where he founded the company in a garage about three decades ago, was more than USD 2.04 billion, according to the listed price totals.

The stocks were grouped in five blocks between 1 million and more than 3.2 million.

In a separate SEC filing, Bezos listed the proposed sale of 50 million Amazon shares around 7 February with an estimated market value of USD 8.4 billion.

Bezos stepped down as Amazon's CEO in 2021 to spend more time on his other projects, including the rocket company, Blue Origin, and his philanthropy, and his philanthropy. His address on the stock filings is listed as Seattle, although he reportedly has relocated to Miami. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- Bezos stepped down as Amazon's CEO in 2021 to spend more time on his other projects, including the rocket company, Blue Origin, and his philanthropy

LARGE-CAP MUTUAL FUNDS GARNER ₹1.2CR

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Investors flocked to large-cap oriented mutual funds with influx of Rs 1,287 crore in January, making it the highest fund infusion in 19 months, as a significant run-up in small and mid caps prompted them to book profit.This is a huge turnaround following a net outflow of Rs 281 crore in December. Also, the quantum was 80 per cent higher than inflows of Rs 716 crore in January last year.

The latest inflow helped push the asset base of large-cap equity category by 26 per cent to Rs 3 lakh crore at January-end from Rs 2.38 lakh crore a year ago.According to latest data by Association of Mutual Funds in India (Amfi), equity mutual funds focused on large-cap received inflow to the tune of Rs 1,287 crore in January. This was the highest level since July 2022, when the category saw an inflow of Rs 2,052 crore.Besides, mid-cap oriented funds and small-cap focused funds continued to attract investors with inflows of Rs 2,061 crore and Rs 3,257 crore, respectively. *—PTI*

RCF aims to launch first prototype of Vande Metro coach

KAPURTHALA, 11 FEB

The Rail Coach Factory (RCF) in Kapurthala in Punjab is aiming to roll out the first prototype of Vande Metro coach for intercity travel by April this year, its general manager S Srinivas has said.A total of 16 such coaches are expected to be ready by the later part of 2024-25 financial year, he said.

"This train is meant for intercity traffic," Srinivas said, adding, "We are aiming that the first prototype is ready by April."

Following trials, the RCF will start its production.

Vande Metro trains will enhance passenger experience and accessibility, he said, adding each coach will have the capacity to carry 280 passengers -- 100 seating capacity and 180 standing capacity.The 3x3 bench-type seating arrangement maximises passenger capacity, providing a comfortable medium-distance commute, he said.

The train will be equipped with the Kavach system, which is a pivotal measure to prevent collisions ***PHOTO: PTI***

- A RCF is a coach manufacturing unit of Indian Railways. It has built over 43,000 coaches since its inception in 1988

There will be a wheelchair-accessible lavatory in coaches, he said.The train will be equipped with the Kavach system, which is a pivotal measure to prevent collisions, he said.

Srinivas also said the RCF rolled out 24 special Rajdhani sleeper coaches in December last year for running a long-distance train on the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla section.

RCF is a coach manufacturing unit of Indian Railways. It has built over 43,000 coaches since its inception in 1988. *—PTI*

Red Sea crisis to impact costs: Maruti

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Maruti Suzuki, may see some increase in costs, due to rerouting of vessels amid the ongoing Red Sea crisis, a senior official, from the company, claimed.

The auto major, which exported around 2.7 lakh cars last calendar year, however, noted, that it does not expect the issue to have a very big impact on the company's overseas shipments.

"We are seeing some logistical challenges because of the Red Sea issue. And there may be some increase in costs, because of risk or rerouting of vessels, but it should not be significant," said MSI Executive Officer (Corporate Affairs), Rahul Bharti, in an analyst call.

"The lead time of dispatches might change, and there may be some uncertainty in vessels coming and picking up their consignments, among other things," he noted.

The Red Sea strait is crucial for 30 per cent of the global container traffic and 12 per cent of global trade. About 80 per cent of India's merchandise trade with Europe, passes through this route.

The situation around the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial shipping route, for traders connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, has escalated due to attacks by Yemen-based Houthi militants since December 2023.

Because of this, the shipping costs have jumped and the consignments are taking more time to reach Europe and the US, as the ships are taking the Cape of Good Hope route, encircling Africa.

The government is signing some FTAs, where the company might get some relief in duty, Bharti said. He noted that the automaker is also gearing up to commence production of battery electric vehicles, (BEVs) this year. *—PTI*

Red Sea crisis impacting supply chain: Audi India Head

MUONIO, 11 FEB

The situation in the Red Sea is creating supply chain issues for German luxury carmaker Audi, impacting car deliveries to customers in India in the first quarter but recovery is expected in the coming months, according to a senior company official.

With electrification on its primary agenda, the company is also evaluating the possibility of assembling electric cars in India, Audi India Head Balbir Singh Dhillon told PTI.

"We are also challenged from time to time by various factors. Very recently because of the Red Sea situation there is a supply chain constraint that we're facing in the quarter one of 2024. It is challenging for us in the first quarter but we expect to recover in the coming months," he said.

Dhillon was responding to a query on outlook and challenges in 2024. Deliveries to customers for certain models at present have been delayed by a few weeks, he noted.

- Container vessels have been facing attacks in the Red Sea, one of the important trade routes since November last year following Israel's war against Hamas

Container vessels have been facing attacks in the Red Sea, one of the most important trade routes in the world, since November last year following Israel's war against Hamas.

Going forward, Audi globally is going to launch many new products and some of them will also make it to India, Dhillon added. *—PTI*

STOCK MARKET WATCH

Inflation, global trends to drive market this wk

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Stock markets would take cues from the upcoming macroeconomic data announcements and global trends besides keeping a watch on the trading activity of foreign investors, analysts said.The last batch of the ongoing earnings calendar would trigger stock-specific action, traders said.

"This week, we have to deal with macroeconomic data on both the domestic and global front. Our IIP and retail inflation numbers will be released on 12 February, while WPI will be released on 14 February. The US CPI numbers will be released on February 13, while their retail sales numbers will be announced on February 15."Amid these numbers, the movement in US bond yields and the dollar index will be watched. Apart from this, movement of crude oil and flows from institutional investors will be other important factors.

The last batch of Q3 earnings can lead to stock-specific movements," said Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd.

PHOTO: PTI

"This week, market will react to the global and domestic economic data, FII (Foreign Institutional Investors), DII (Domestic Institutional Investors) investment pattern, crude oil inventories, ongoing quarterly earnings, movement of the rupee against the dollar, trend in the global stock market. Domestic economic numbers will also be in focus such as inflation data and industrial production," Arvinder Singh Nanda, Senior Vice President, Master Capital Services Ltd, said.

Last week, the BSE benchmark declined 490.14 points or 0.67 per cent , and the Nifty dipped 71.3 points or 0.32 per cent.

"We expect the market to turn cautious and consolidate in the near term amid key macro data to be announced and the last leg of Q3 results," said Siddhartha Khemka, Head - Retail Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd. *— PTI*

BIOGAS ASSOCIATION NEEDS ₹30K CRORE

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Indian Biogas Association has recommended an investment of Rs 30,000 crore for machinery and equipment required for biomass supply to compressed biogas plants to ensure 12 MMTA of LNG import reduction.

"Utilising agricultural residues like paddy straw for bioenergy production and soil enrichment instead of burning those offers a dual benefit as it provides renewable energy sources while enhancing soil health," said Indian Biogas Association Chairman Gaurav Kedia.

However, he pointed out that there are obstacles to procurement, such as unappealing economics, which makes farmers prefer to burn rather than sell off the field straw promptly.

Due to the low density of straw, which increases the expenses associated with its collection, storage, and transportation, he stated, "Improving logistics is not a feasible solution. Government intervention is essential to encourage the adoption of necessary equipment, such as subsidising combine harvesters capable of efficiently gathering straw". *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Shankar wins season-opening meet in Belgium

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

National record holder in high jump Tejaswin Shankar won the top prize in the International High Jump Gala Elmos 2024 athletics meet in Heist-op-den-Berg, Belgium with a leap of 2.23 metres.Shankar, competing for the first time since October last year, finished ahead of Greece's Antonios Merlos (2.20 metres) in the World Athletics Indoor Tour Challenger event on Saturday.The 25-year-old, who holds both the men's high jump and decathlon national records, however, could not better his personal best of 2.29m.Shankar is also focusing on decathlon and won bronze and silver in the discipline at the Asian Championships and Asian Games last year.—*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gukesh loses three rounds, finishes sixth in play-offs

WANGELS, 11 FEB

India's Grandmaster D Gukesh had to be content with a sixth-place finish in the rapid play-offs of the Weissenhaus Freestyle Chess challenge after losing the last three rounds here. Nodirbek Abdusattarov of Uzbekistan dominated the rapid event that was mainly done to determine the pairings for the knockout stage.

The young Uzbek ended with an impressive 5.5 points out of a possible seven and finished a half point clear of Vincent Keymer of Germany. Fabiano American Levon Aronian ended seventh ahead of the struggling reigning world champion Ding Liren who made just a draw with six losses in the event.—*AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Debutant Sharma completes 10-wkt match haul

THUTHIPET, 11 FEB

Left-arm spinner Vanshaj Sharma completed a maiden ten-wicket match haul on his debut as Jammu and Kashmir dismissed Puducherry for 67 in their chase of 87 to register a 19-run win in the Ranji Trophy group D match here on Sunday.Resuming at 35 for 7, Puducherry folded in 35.3 overs with the 20-year-old Sharma claiming all the remaining three wickets, returning with figures of 5 for 16 to go with his first innings figures of 5 for 74.On Saturday, another left-arm spinner Abid Mushtaq notched up a 10-wicket match haul, his second in First-Class cricket. He had taken five for 28 in the second innings.—*PTI*

Sheeraz, Ganemat top Indian finishers in skeet in Rabat

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Sheeraz Sheikh and Ganemat Sekhon were the top Indian finishers in men's and women's skeet respectively, at the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Cup Shotgun in Rabat, Morocco, on Sunday.Sheeraz shot 120, courtesy of five identical rounds of 24 across two days and 125 targets. He finished 11th with the sixth and final qualifying spot going at 121. Abhay Singh Sekhon (116) and Battula (109) finished further down the standings.In women's skeet, Ganemat's tally of 114 gave her 12th spot with the final qualification spot going at 117.—*AP*

Australia dash Indian dreams with 79-run victory

We played rash shots and couldn't execute plans: Saharan

BENONI, 11 FEB

Australia players pose with the trophy after winning the Under-19 World Cup youth one-day international (YODI) final against India at Willowmoore Park *PHOTO: PTI*

A fresh chapter was added to the script of Australia's domination over India in the ICC World Cup finals when they bagged the Under-19 title with a 79-run victory on Sunday. Batting by choice, the Aussies posted a healthy 253 for seven as India was forced to mount the highest chase in a youth World Cup summit clash.

But Uday Saharan's side floundered in the final step to glory, stumbling to 174 all out as the relentless Aussie bowlers led by the furious Mahli Beardman (3/15) and the crafty off-spinner Raf MacMillan (3/43) did not give them any breathing space.

This was Australia's fourth U19 title and first since 2010 and, in a way, they also washed away the pain of losing to India in two title matches in 2012 and 2018.

India skipper Uday Saharan admitted that his batters faltered in their execution and paid the price for playing rash shots in a heartbreaking 79-run loss to Australia in the U-19 World Cup final here on Sunday.

Set 254 to win, India cut a sorry figure with the bat as they were all out for 174 in 43.5 overs.Opener Adarsh Singh (47) and number 8 Murugan Abhishek (42) were the only Indian batters who showed the stomach to fight as the title slipped out of their hands.

"We played a few rash shots, couldn't spend more time at the crease. We had prepared, but couldn't execute," said Saharan during the post-match presentation.While India faltered in the final step, skipper Saharan praised the team for their impressive run in the tournament."

It was a very good tournament. I am very proud of the boys, they all played very well. They all showed great fighting spirit from the start, very proud of them," he said."

We got to learn a lot from the start to now. From the coaching staff to the games, learned a lot. Now we just need to keep learning more and move ahead."

For Australia, it was their fourth U-19 World Cup title."It's unbelievable. I am so proud of this group of boys and the coaches. A lot of work has gone in over the last few months," Australia captain Hugh Weibgen said.

"We had a fair bit of confidence that if we got 250 on the board, we'd defend it.

India is a class side, they dominated the whole tournament and they were on the wrong side today but they have a lot of class.Australia 253 for 7 (Harjas 55, Weibgen 48, Peake 46*, Limbani 3-68) beat India 174 (Adarsh 47, Abishek 42, Beardman 3-15, MacMillan 3-43) by 79 runs.

—*PTI*

Glenn Maxwell smashed his 5th T20I hundred. *PHOTO: ANI*

Maxwell ton equals Rohit's historic feat

ADELAIDE, 11 FEB

Glenn Maxwell continued his imperious form as he smashed a 55-ball 120 not out to equal Indian skipper Rohit Sharma's record of most centuries (five) in the T20I format here on Sunday. Batting at No. 4, Maxwell unleashed his fury against the West Indies bowlers, smacking 12 fours and eight sixes to bring up his century in 50 balls.His knock propelled Australia to a mammoth 241/4.

In reply, the hosts restricted the West Indies to 207/9 to win the second T20I by 34 runs.Maxwell's last nine international scores for Australia now read 106, 41, 201 not out, 1, 2 not out, 12, 104 not out, 10 and 120 not out.

"It was good fun," Maxwell said at the mid-innings break."Just gave myself a chance. It's a nice wicket. Nice to cash in and spend most of the time out there. I've always relied on my hand speed to get me out of trouble... and it seemed to work for me today."

Maxwell was also the fastest to reach five centuries, touching the landmark in 93 innings, compared to Rohit's 143 innings.

—*AP*

Arsenal smash six past woeful West Ham to send title message

LONDON, 11 FEB

Arsenal exacted sweet revenge on West Ham United with a 6-0 away thrashing to stay right in the thick of the Premier League title race on Sunday, obliterating their hosts before halftime.

Mikel Arteta's side had lost twice against their London rivals this season but were 4-0 ahead by half-time with goals by William Saliba, Bukayo Saka, Gabriel, and Leandro Trossard.

The punishment continued in the second half with Saka making it 5-0 before former West Ham midfielder Declan Rice, who assisted two goals in the opening period, thumped his team's sixth on a day of abject humiliation for the hosts.

It was a sublime display by Arsenal who wiped off a goal difference deficit to champions Manchester City who they joined on 52 points, although they stay in third place courtesy of scoring fewer goals. —*AP*

India beat Netherlands 4-2

NEW DELHI, 11 FEB

Veteran goalkeeper PR Sreejesh turned out to be the savior as the Indian men's hockey team defeated world number one Netherlands 4-2 via a shoot-out in the FIH Pro League in Bhubaneswar on Sunday.

Sreejesh made three fine saves in the shoot-out to hand India the bonus two points after both the teams were locked at 2-2 at the end of regulation 60 minutes. The Netherlands took one point from the match. In the shoot-out, skipper Harmanpreet Singh, Sukhjeet Singh, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, and Shamsher Singh scored for world number three India.

In the regulation time, Hardik Singh (13th minute) and Harmanpreet (58th) found the net for India, while Jip Janssen (30th) and Koen Bijen scored for the Dutch.

The Netherlands put the home team's defense under pressure in the initial eight minutes of the match with play mostly restricted to the Indian circle.

But the Indian defense dished out a solid performance to weather the initial storm.

The Indians initially failed to keep possession of the ball but gained confidence as the match progressed.

—*PTI*

Jack Leach *PHOTO: ANI*

England spinner Leach ruled out of Tests

LONDON, 11 FEB

England left-arm spinner Jack Leach was on Sunday ruled out of the remaining three Tests against India with a left knee injury, announced the England and Wales Cricket Board.

However, no replacement will be called up for Leach, an indication that England will continue with the spin trio of Tom Hartley, Rehan Ahmed, and Shoaib Basheer for the rest of the tour.

Joe Root is the visitors' fourth spin option behind the three regular spinners.

Leach had sustained the injury during England's first Test victory in Hyderabad and missed the second Test in Visakhapatnam as a result.

"He will fly home from Abu Dhabi in the next 24 hours, where the England team has been staying ahead of the third Test in Rajkot, which starts on Thursday (15 February). —*PTI*

Despite Ajith Ram's fifer, Karnataka frontrunners vs TN

CHENNAI, 11 FEB

Ajith Ram celebrates the wicket of Karnataka's batter Kishan *PHOTO: PTI*

Left-arm spinner Ajith Ram's five-wicket haul helped Tamil Nadu bowl out Karnataka for 139 but the visitors still held the edge in their Ranji Trophy Group C match here on Sunday.

Ram (5/61) and Sai Kishore (2/27) shared the spoils to bundle out Karnataka in 56.4 overs to set themselves a target of 355. First innings centurion Devdutt Paddikal was Karnataka's top-scorer with a 56-ball 36. At stumps on the penultimate day, Tamil Nadu was 36/1, still needing 319 runs. Vimal Kumar was batting on 16 and giving him company was Pradosh Ranjan Paul on 10. Narayan Jagadeesan (8) was the only batter to be dismissed. Resuming on 129/7 in reply to Karnataka's 366, Tamil Nadu added just 22 runs before being bowled out. In Mohali, hosts Punjab were in real trouble after being reduced to 40/4 in their second innings in pursuit of an improbable target of 411 runs. —*PTI*

Sumit Nagal defeated Italy's Luca Nardi 6-1, 6-4 in the Chennai Open final on Sunday to clinch his fifth title on the Challenger Tour while also assuring himself of a Top 100 debut in next week's ATP Rankings. India's Sumit Nagal poses with the trophy during the presentation ceremony *PHOTO: PTI*

Giron to face Paul in Dallas Open final

TORONTO, 11 FEB

Tommy Paul *PHOTO: X*

Paul beat fellow American Ben Shelton 6-2, 6-4 to reach Sunday's final, where he'll be chasing a second ATP Tour title as Giron seeks his first.

Giron, ranked 67th in the world, followed up a dominant quarter-final victory over top-seeded Frances Tiafoe with another convincing win. He saved the only break point he faced and converted four of his eight break chances against France's Mannarino, the world number 17 who won three titles last year to take his career tally to five.Giron will be playing in just his second ATP final, having fallen in his first at San Diego in 2022. Paul, ranked 15th in the world, needed just 79 minutes to eliminate 16th-ranked Shelton."These courts helped me a little bit," Paul said. "They're not jumping quite as high as some of the other courts we've played on. Kept the ball in my strike zone a little bit more." Paul advanced to Sunday's championship match against the winner of a later semifinal between American Marcos Giron and French fourth seed Adrian Mannarino. —*AP*

Ashwin lauds Bumrah's Himalayan feat

CHENNAI, 11 FEB

R Ashwin *PHOTO: PTI*

Jasprit Bumrah *PHOTO: PTI*

Lavishing praise on teammate Jasprit Bumrah, senior India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin said "Boomball" stole the show in the second Test against England and the pacer reaching the top of the ICC rankings across three formats is a "Himalayan feat".

Bumrah displayed brilliance with the ball to play a key role in the team's series-leveling 106-run win in the second Test in Visakhapatnam.

He put up a reverse swing master-class in England's first innings that yielded him six wickets (6/45), following it up with a three-wicket haul in their second essay for match figures of 9 for 91.

His performance enabled him to jump to number one in the Test rankings list, becoming the first Indian pacer to achieve the feat. Bumrah has also held the top spot in the ODI and T20 rankings previously.

"The real show stealer was BoomBall. Jasprit Bumrah has bowled extraordinarily," Ashwin said on his YouTube channel.

"He is the leading wicket-taker with 14 wickets and also the No.1 ranked Test bowler. The first India fast bowler to achieve number one across all formats. I am a big fan of his and this is a Himalayan feat."

Ashwin said that the extraordinary vibe and energy on the fourth day of the second Test helped India secure a favorable result.

"We came into the fourth day with it all being even stars. But our extraordinary vibe, energy, and team performance helped us level the series 1-1."

The five-match series will be played across Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam, Rajkot, Ranchi, and Dharamsala and Ashwin noted that most Indian players have not played Test cricket at these venues.

"There's never been a marquee Test series like this in five such venues before. In 2017, we played Australia in Dharamsala and Ranchi and then Pune and Bengaluru. Usually, if there is a 4-5 match Test series at least one or two happen in metro cities.

"Unlike that, this time it's happening in venues that weren't part of World Cup matches.

"For most of the Indian players, these venues are new. There are a lot of players playing in our team who haven't played a first-class or Test match in Vizag stadium.

—*PTI*

AGAINST EX-WFI CHIEF

Sakshi slams PT Usha, Kom for not backing stir

TRIVANDRUM, 11 FEB

Sakshi Malik *PHOTO: PTI*

PT Usha and Mary Kom *PHOTO: PTI*

- Sakshi Malik has launched a scathing attack on the country's iconic sportspersons PT Usha and Mary Kom for not extending support to the public protests by a group of female wrestlers

Retired Indian wrestler Sakshi Malik has launched a scathing attack on the country's iconic sportspersons PT Usha and Mary Kom for not extending support to the public protests by a group of female wrestlers over sexual harassment charges against former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh.

Though Usha and Mary Kom were celebrated as "inspirations" by sportspersons like her, they did not speak up for the aggrieved woman wrestlers despite listening to their stories, Malik said. The Olympic medal winner was speaking during a recent session held as part of the ongoing Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters (MBIFL) 2024 at Kanakakkunnu here.

Expressing shock over the response of the legendary sports stars towards their agitation, she said both of them had assured all support to wrestlers but did nothing to find any solution. "P T Usha madam had visited our protest venue. We told her in detail about our issues... She could have supported us...But she remained silent despite assuring us that she would stand by us and extend all help," Malik said. The wrestler said she was deeply anguished over Kom's silence as she was considered an "inspirational" figure by her. "Even she didn't speak for us and remained silent," Malik said on Saturday at the fifth edition of MBIFL where over 400 speakers from around the world have been invited to participate and share their views and experiences. Top grapplers such as Bajrang Punia, Vinesh Phogat, and Sakshi Malik had staged a sit-in protest in New Delhi demanding the arrest of Bhushan after accusing him of sexual harassment against female grapplers.

Later, Punia returned his Padma Shri award to the government in protest over Bhushan's aide, Sanjay Singh, being elected as the WFI chief.

—*PTI*